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ANTHEM PUBLISHING
CLASSIC POP
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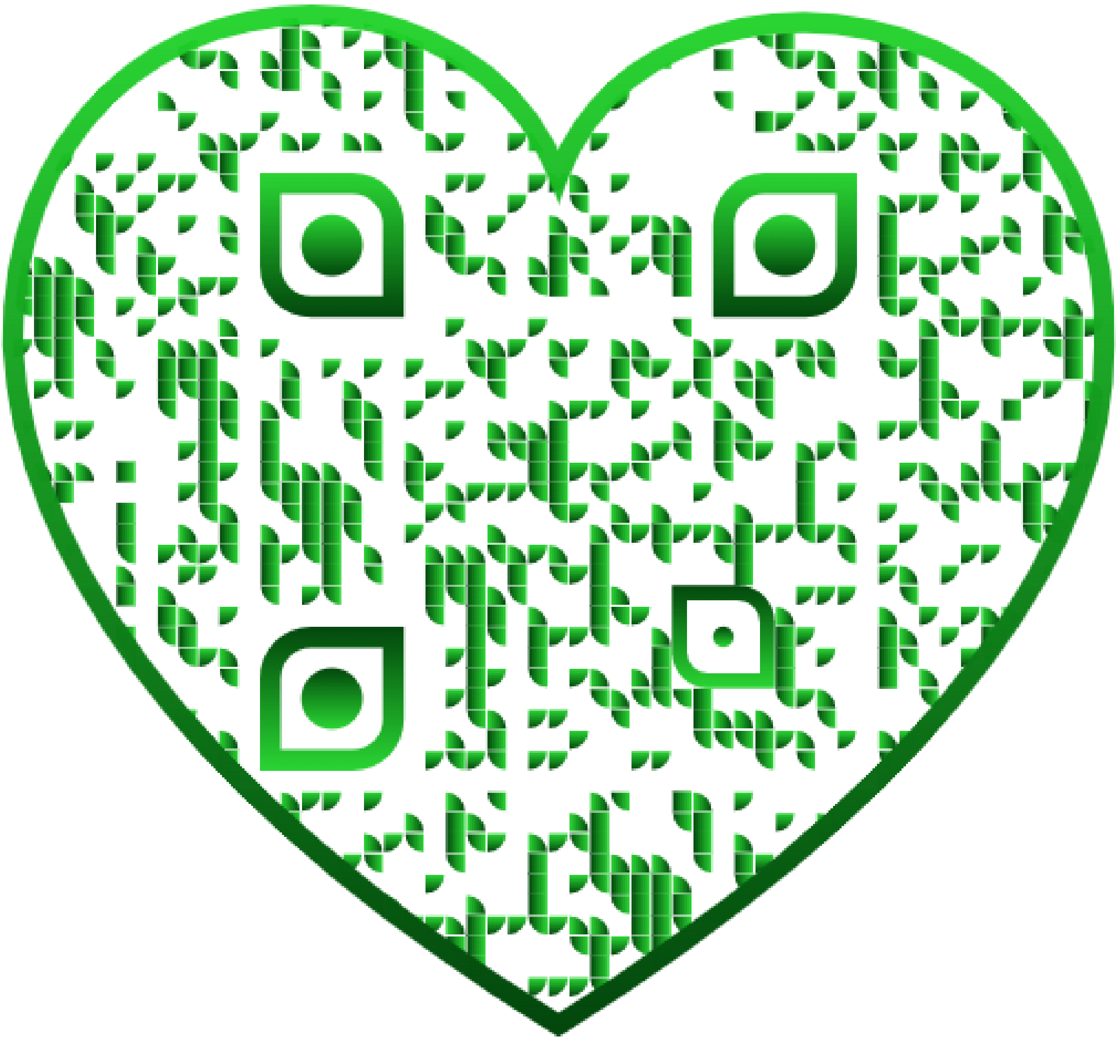
ISSUE 99
PRICE £7
9 772050 664341 99



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WELCOME

As an opening statement of intent, you can't get much more thrilling than The Power Station's stunning *Some Like It Hot* debut single. It's quite simply the sound of four stellar musicians being let off the leash. "Feel the heat, burning you up, ready or not!" warns Robert Palmer as the band come stampeding over the horizon.

And that visceral energy continues throughout the supergroup's brilliant eponymous album that we return to this month for our world exclusive cover feature ahead of its 40th anniversary deluxe reissue.

That album really is an absolute belter. Chic's Tony Thompson frees his inner John Bonham, John Taylor serves up his funkiest basslines while Andy Taylor shreds with the best of 'em. And it was all topped off with the effortlessly cool Palmer.

It was an incredible line-up of creative talent who exploded onto the scene in 1985 only to burn out far too soon – at least in their first incarnation.

After putting himself back in the mainstream spotlight via his high-profile association with The Power Station, Palmer returned to his solo career leaving the Taylors, Thompson and supersub Michael Des Barres to embark upon a hedonism-packed tour that has since gone down in rock'n'roll lore, only pausing for breath to record a quick cameo on the biggest TV show of the day – *Miami Vice*. "I only had one line [on the show]," explains John Taylor. "Which is the only time on that tour where I can say I only had one line."

Elsewhere this issue, we talk to the two halves of Propaganda as *A Secret Wish* gets a bells-and-whistles boxset for its own 40th birthday. While their split was on the acrimonious side, it seems the intervening years have at least partially healed some of those old fissures. Join us as *CP* adds to the healing process with our in-depth interview.

And ahead of a new career-spanning compilation that lives up to its 'definitive' billing, we catch up with Mancunian indie legends James who look back on their various triumphs as well as a handful of self-inflicted career own goals.

Some very sad news indeed to end, though. Just an hour before we sent this issue to press, we learned of the passing of Soft Cell's Dave Ball.

A regular interviewee in these pages, Dave will be much missed. *CP*'s John Earls pays tribute to his friend in our news section, while a comprehensive obituary features on our website.

Steve

Steve Harnell, Senior Editor
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THE POWER STATION

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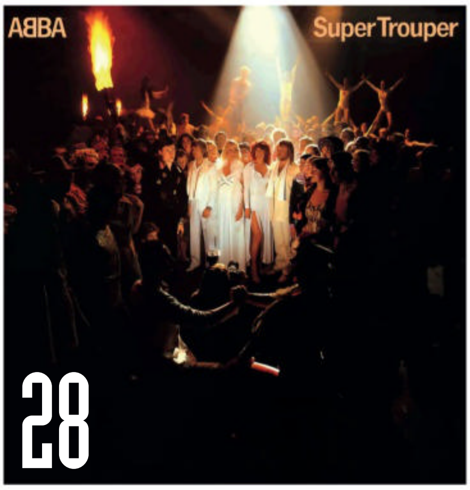
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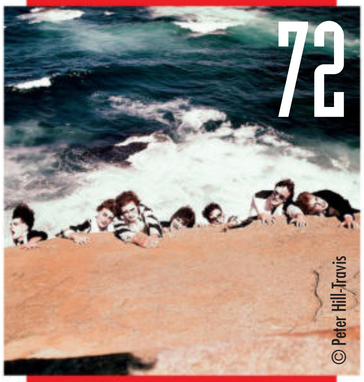

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Anthem Publishing
Media House, 1 Widcombe
Parade, Bath BA2 4JT
www.classicpopmag.com

Newsstand cover main image:
Brian Aris

Subscriber cover image:
Brian Aris

All magazine images
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*1 "Not just my favourite supergroup song, it's my all-time favourite pop single."

*2 "One of the catchiest, radio-friendly hits of 1987."

*3 "A joyous single that's deserving of far more recognition."

*4 "The easiest 'What's Your Favourite...?' question ever posed at the front of the mag."

*5 "A euphoric, defiant anthem for our troubled times."

*6 "If Scott Walker had joined an indie band in the 2000s, it might have sounded something like this."

*7 "One of the best choruses of all time."

*8 "Featuring elements from three of the greatest acts of the 80s, this was the moment that the 90s began."

*9 "A moody masterpiece."

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

The winner of the Best Writer, Specialist category, in 2022's British Society of Magazine Editors Awards, *CP*'s Reviews Editor **John Earls** serves up our world exclusive cover feature interview with John Taylor and Andy Taylor from The Power Station and also talks to both halves of Propaganda as the group's *A Secret Wish* gets the boxset treatment.

New Zealander **Andy Fyfe** has been living in the UK and writing about music for over 35 years, including at *NME*, *Smash Hits*, *Select*, *Q* and *Mojo*. Celebrating the 50th anniversary boxset of Split Enz's debut album *Mental Notes*, in this issue he interviews singer Tim Finn and producer Phil Manzanera. Andy bought the original album the day it was released in NZ with his 11th birthday money.

Felix Rowe has extensively toured the US, performed with a Chili Pepper, barbecued with a Blues Brother and shared a Mars bar with George Martin. He has written for publications including *Classic Pop*, *Vintage Rock*, *Clash*, *Long Live Vinyl*, *Louder* and *Record Collector*. This issue, Felix meets Bruce Watson to talk all things Big Country and revisits ABBA's *Super Trouper* for our latest classic album.

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES **+44 (0)1371 853609** *classicpopmag@anthem.co.uk*
PRINTING **William Gibbons & Son** *Tel* +44 (0)1902 730011 DISTRIBUTION **Marketforce UK** 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6QA
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POP UP

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OBITUARY

DAVE BALL

3 MAY 1959 – 22 OCTOBER 2025

Classic Pop is devastated to learn of the death of Dave Ball, half of Soft Cell and The Grid and a respected producer for Kylie, The Virgin Prunes and Billie Ray Martin, as well as a remixer for David Bowie and Erasure. He was 66.

Dave was one of synth-pop's great visionaries, his passion for music and synthesizers leading him to write the music for a string of varied classic singles, from the melancholia of *Torch* and *Say Hello, Wave Goodbye* to the dark mania of *Bedsitter* and *Soul Inside* and the mischief of The Grid's acid house smash *Swamp Thing.*

At the forefront of exploring the possibilities of 12" singles, Dave's passion for reworking and extending songs led Soft Cell to be pioneers of Extended Versions, a gift Dave later brought to his remixes for others, as well as revisiting Soft Cell's songs for new remixes later in their career.

Soft Cell's early gigs were famously wild, a spirit that remained even when they reformed for a memorable three-hour show at London's O2 Arena in 2018: an instant sell-out for a concert true to Dave and Marc Almond's rebellious streak. That stayed for their further concerts together, with their final gig just weeks ago, headlining Rewind.

Meeting Marc Almond at Leeds Polytechnic in 1979, the duo bonded over a love for the possibilities of electronic music and for bringing the darker side of life to their work. Dave's work with Richard Norris in The Grid was also influential, his dry wit emerging in their off-kilter, unpredictable yet invariably infectious music.

Dave insisted throughout his career he was an unlikely pop star, but had a natural charisma and easygoing warmth that meant he was a natural as Marc's seemingly stoic foil in Soft Cell.

A back injury in a fall at home on the eve of 2022's **Happiness Not Included*'s album release left Dave in a wheelchair, but he bore his injuries with a typical good humour, joking about the high the medical drugs that he took for his recovery gave him.

When *Classic Pop* last met Dave in September to discuss the reissue of *The Art Of Falling Apart*, he was in excellent mood: bright, funny, joking about a recent love for *Coronation Street*, as well as excited about the new Soft Cell album, *Danceteria*, which he had just completed with Marc.

Dave was a friend away from interviewing him, and we were in the same weekly music quiz team for several years in the Noughties. In truth, Dave's memory for music trivia wasn't exceptional, but his wealth of stories, told in his dry Blackpool accent, were magnificent.

Mourn the loss of Dave as an artist and also please know that Dave Ball was one of the sharpest, funniest and kindest people in music.

John Earls

HAIRCUT ONE HUNDRED CONFIRM LONG-AWAITED ALBUM RETURN

BOXING THE COMPASS
HAIRCUT ONE HUNDRED

Haircut One Hundred will release their first album with Nick Heyward in 44 years, *Boxing The Compass*, on 20 March 2026.

An unexpected second chapter in the Haircut One Hundred story began earlier this year with the release of *The Unloving Plum* – a BBC Radio 2 Record of the Week, it was a track that showed the magic which inspired classic 80s hits like *Favourite Shirts (Boy Meets Girl)*, *Love Plus One*, *Fantastic Day* and *Nobody's Fool*.

Heyward said: "*Boxing The Compass* is the traditional way of finding out where you are on land or sea using the compass rose. We're arriving back at the port we left 43 years ago with a log of songs from our personal travels. Wherever I've been in the world, I've always been Nick Heyward of Haircut One Hundred, and we're all ready to set sail again for more adventures on the high seas."

The band, completed by guitarist Graham Jones, bassist Les Nemes and drummer Blair Cunningham, will tour the UK next spring. Opening at the London Palladium on 1 May, they will go on to visit nine venues before concluding on 17 May at the Engine Shed in Lincoln. Visit haircut100.com for full tour details.

STOP PRESS

ADAM ANT

THE SINGLES

SONY

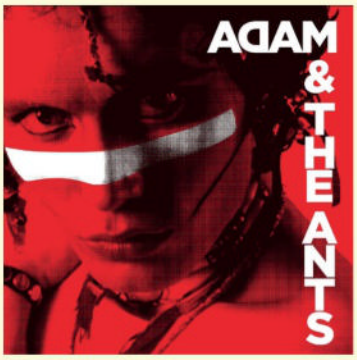
★★★★½

© Alamy

CAREER-SPANNING SET HIGHLIGHTS HOW THE STAR WAS UNTOUCHABLE DURING A LONG IMPERIAL PHASE

While Adam Ant has been a reliably magnificent live extravaganza for the past 15 years, the release of any of his music is a rarer treat: there's been nothing since the excellent *Kings Of The Wild Frontier* boxset in 2016.

Having a singles compilation is surprisingly overdue, too, with the most recent round-up 13 years ago.



Out as a CD/2LP, *The Singles* updates the previous vinyl Ant compilation, *Hits*, from 1986. This one is mostly thorough, though half a completists' mark off for omitting *Deutscher Girls*, *Gotta Be A Sin* and *Cool Zombie*.

What you do get, is of course, magnificent.

The chronological sequencing means we start with *Young Parisians*, Adam And The Ants' punk equivalent of *The Laughing Gnome*. Once that's dispensed with, there's the intensely staring ferocity of *Zerox* and *Cartrouble* before the Ants went hyperreal with a fresh line-up for a new decade and became absolutely untouchable.

There's imperial phases, and then there's the determination to entertain in as many guises as possible that Adam Ant displayed from *Kings Of The Wild Frontier* up until the slightly try-hard romp of *Rough Stuff* a decade later. Take out the "Better as a B-side" cartoonish *Desperate But Not Serious* and there might not be a better singles run in pop history. Variously leapfrogging the dog, unplugging the jukebox and priding about the manner around *Kings…*, the Ants both sounded like and caused absolute mayhem. What followed managed to rule the early 80s: some feat, considering the stiffness of the competition. If an indolent public started taking Adam for granted, he kept up the quality. Sneer about Live Aid all you like, but *Apollo 9* is a staggering work of NASA-fuelled glamour and space rockets, while *Vive Le Rock* lived up to its claim of rockers going *Star Wars*.

On his return, Adam seemed in danger of briefly showing too much Stuart Goddard and letting everyone see the real Ant, but he took on Prince and came out honours even on *Room At The Top*, rounding things off with the late flourishing mastery of love songs in *Wonderful*.

This is what singles compilations should be about. More than anyone, Adam Ant knows the power of a great 7", and you're reminded of that throughout *The Singles*.

Familiar as most of these songs are to everyone, the "What *is* that?" factor of *Stand And Deliver*'s mania is still intoxicating.

Now all that remains is for a proper reissue campaign to happen. **John Earls**

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NOW turns back the clock to the early 60s

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Also released will be a 3LP red coloured vinyl, boasting 54 tracks.

Find out more at nowmusic.com.

Scan the QR code to enter our competition to win all three versions of *NOW Yearbook Presents The 60s Vol 1: 1960-1962.*

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Tom Bailey tours Thompson Twins' greatest hits

Tom Bailey will play Thompson Twins' classic hits on a 14-date UK tour next September, with support from Blancmange's Neil Arthur.

The tour opens on 10 September in Aylesbury at The Waterside Theatre and takes in Bath, Bournemouth, Nottingham, Whitley Bay, Glasgow, Birmingham and London as well as further dates in Brighton, Guildford, Cambridge, Buxton and Manchester, before closing in York on 26 September.

The tour announcement follows the October release of the new Thompson Twins best of *Industry & Seduction*, which we reviewed in Issue 98.

Supporting Bailey on tour is Neil Arthur, who will be celebrating the legacy of Blancmange and his late bandmate Stephen Luscombe.

1 HIT WONDER

LAST NIGHT A D.J. SAVED MY LIFE

INDEEP

A blending of dance music's past, present and future gave songwriter Michael Cleveland one of the most innovative singles of the 80s as New York club troupe Indeep filled floors and gatecrashed playlists with something very different. Cleveland melded discredited disco, popular electro-soul and rising hip-hop with an irresistible post-disco beat, a clever synthesized funk riff and an outstanding combination of vocals. The track featured Rose Marie Ramsey bemoaning a cheating beau's absence while listening to the radio on her own, only for the titular jock to reassure her with the kind of soundbites that maintained a presence in dance music parlance for years to come, all culminating in a rapped link from Cleveland that lauded his mixing skills. The track struts cockily, its groove incessant and arrogant, capturing cool while respecting what had gone before. It also avoided potentially grating repercussions of illustrating certain lyrics with sound effects: a ringing phone ("called you on the phone, no-one's home"), screeching tyres ("I hopped into my car, didn't get very far") and most memorably, a flushing lavatory ("away goes trouble down the drain..."). A club hit in the US, the track reached No.13 in the UK in 1983. The 12" included instrumental and a cappella mixes, plus all three sound effects as isolated tracks. A follow-up, *When Boys Talk*, made No.67 the same year.

SOUND OF NEW YORK
INDEEP
LAST NIGHT A D.J. SAVED MY LIFE (Vocal)
(Mike Cleveland) 4.16
MCPS
Planetary Nom (Ldn) Ltd
SNY 1
SNY 1-A
℗ 1982 Phenix Inc
Co-Produced by Mike Cleveland & Reggie Thompson
Exec Prod Gene Griffin
Young Lions Productions
Sure Shot Mix by Tony Humphries
Made in England

MATTHEW RUDD IS THE HOST OF FORGOTTEN 80s ON ABSOLUTE 80s

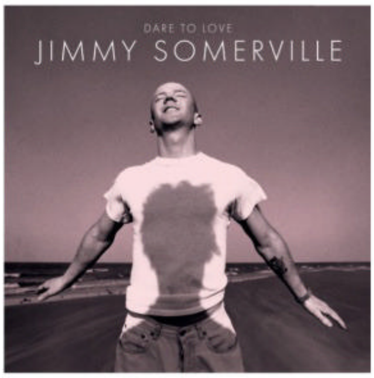
JIMMY SOMERVILLE DARES TO LOVE AGAIN

The second solo album by Jimmy Somerville, *Dare To Love*, will receive a 30th anniversary reissue on 5 December. Fully remastered and available for the very first time on double vinyl, as well as 2CD and digital formats, the reissue features a different cover image of Somerville and previously unreleased B-sides, rarities and remixes by Todd Terry, The Beatmasters, Sly & Robbie and more.

The cover art of the 30th anniversary edition features a silhouette of a male figure across Jimmy's torso, notably absent from the original sleeve. Jimmy Somerville said: "This is the 30th anniversary of *Dare To Love* and it's exciting we finally have a sleeve that is as it should have been. I always had to compromise with London Records over something, and this was one I deeply regretted.

"The irony is that London Records thought this photo was too gay, but I now chuckle to myself as I can see their point of view – it's homoerotic and not nice, non-controversial gay... which I have never been!"

Originally released in June 1995, *Dare To Love* was co-produced by Stephen Hague, Gary Wilkinson and Chuck Norman. The album includes the UK Top 30 hits *Heartbeat* (which reached No.1 on the US Dance Singles chart, the only No.1 for Jimmy on a US chart as a solo artist) and *Hurts So Good*, along with the poignant *Safe In These Arms*. For further details, visit jimmysomerville.co.uk.



ULTRAVOX EXPAND ACCLAIMED COMPILATION

ULTRAVOX
THE COLLECTION
[2025 REMASTER]

Following the success in recent years of deluxe edition reissues of the *Vienna*, *Rage In Eden*, *Quartet* and *Lament* albums, Chrysalis Records are releasing an expanded boxset of Ultravox's hugely successful 1984 compilation, *The Collection*, on 5 December.

Originally featuring the 14 singles Ultravox released between 1980 and 1984, the newly remastered compilation has been expanded to a 4CD/2Blu-ray deluxe edition. The set includes a new *Collection II* with a further 14 singles, alongside alternative plus unreleased versions from 1986 to 2024 and 10 newly created 80s-style 12" extended versions mixed by Midge Ure, Steven Wilson, Blank & Jones, among others.

Also included are all the band's B-sides collected for the first time plus two Blu-ray discs with more than four hours of footage featuring all the band's promo videos, alternative versions and a collection of their appearances on BBC TV, from *Top Of The Pops* to live shows.

NORTHSIDE

WITH THE PROMISE OF NEW MATERIAL THREE-AND-A-HALF DECADES AFTER *CHICKEN RHYTHMS* WENT TOP 20, NORTHSIDE ARE SET TO MAKE A RETURN. SINGER WARREN "DERMO" DERMODY TELLS *CLASSIC POP* WHY IT'S TAKEN THEM SO LONG.

JEREMY ALLEN

Northside released their debut album, *Chicken Rhythms*, on Factory Records in 1991

Second-wave Madchester outfit Northside looked all set to build on the success of labelmates like Happy Mondays, though the capitulation of Factory Records in 1992 put an end to their baggy dreams. Now the group are on the comeback trail, 34 years after their hit *Shall We Take A Trip?* was banned by the BBC, with a reissue of their LP *Chicken Rhythms* and a tour with the Mondays pencilled in for 2026.

Dermo, how does the Northside of 2025 differ to 1990?
We're keeping it in the same kind of vein, but I think the new songs are better written now and we can play our instruments better. We were just kids when we made that [first] album.

If you release a new album next summer as planned, then it'll be 35 years since the last one. Why so long?
We did a few dates but after [guitarist] Timmy [Walsh] died [in 2019], it just never seemed to be the right time. For whatever reason, life just gets in the way. I was always writing and getting ideas down, then we got a new guitarist and it just seemed right.

What did producer Ian Broudie bring to your debut album and would you consider him again for the new record?
We're not at that stage yet, but we have got a couple of people in mind – maybe John Leckie or possibly Broudie. Ian brought discipline to the band, which we needed, and he was good with arrangements. He was a bastard for timing, which was great because we were a bit ramshackle.

You were a proper gang, weren't you?
We all grew up next door to each other in Moston and Blackley, North Manchester. That's obviously where our band name comes from. Everything seemed to happen on the south side of Manchester, and at the time that was a big deal to us. We all lived on council estates, and the only ways out was either music, football or boxing.

That upward mobility in music seems to have been lost...
And there doesn't seem to be any tribes anymore. Saying that, the Oasis tour has done wonders. Young kids are getting into the idea of 'real music' rather than all this Auto-tune shite.

If the timing feels right now, circumstances were against you when Factory Records folded. How did you feel about that?
I was depressed. I just went on a self-destruct mission for a few years with the beer and stuff. I had so many plans and so much to do, and it all ended. I was only 21 or 22 and it was like: 'Well, what am I going to do now.'

What happened to the second album you were recording?
We demoed songs, but to be honest I'm glad we never released them. It was all a bit too heavy. A lot of guitarists are into Led Zeppelin and want to turn it up to 11. But take someone like Vini Reilly [The Durutti Column], there's just a bit of delay and some picking, mainly. You can't beat a catchy chorus as far as I'm concerned.

You're going on tour with Happy Mondays next summer and it'll probably be calmer than when you supported them at Elland Road or Manchester Free Trade Hall...
It was chaos. Back then it was more about your mates and the party than the gigs. It was just madness. I'm not slagging it. We loved it. I wouldn't change it for the world but it's hard to remember most of it, to be honest.

Was it advisable to start the track *Shall We Take A Trip* with the words "L. S. D."?
I loved the idea of it. If it affected sales then it also served us well as it put a lot of underground kids onto us. The media want you to say what it's really about, but as soon as you do, they want you to shut your mouth. ■

● *Chicken Rhythms* will be reissued via London Records on 14 November and is reviewed on page 93

LOST & FOUND

LIVING EYES

BEE GEES

Despite society's vendetta against the Bee Gees at the start of the 80s, their 16th album maintained their commitment to quality songwriting.

The disco backlash pressured the Gibbs into changing tack completely and *Living Eyes* was the inoffensive but not defensive result.

A strongroom of businesslike ballads and soft rock tracks that still proudly emphasise their immense harmonies as much as any of their previous floorfillers, it also gives the twins their first lead vocals for five years.

Robin is funky on *Cryin' Every Day*, at his warbling, melancholic best on *Don't Fall In Love With Me* and his harmonies are tremendous on the comely *Paradise*. Meanwhile, Maurice is subtle and demure on *Wildflower*, and on *I Still Love You*, they share the vocal spoils to great effect.

Elsewhere, piano and strings dominate Barry's big ballad *Nothing Could Be Good*, and he's edgy and menacing on *He's A Liar*, conspicuously growling the chorus. Though their falsetto sound is deliberately underused on this album, Barry hits familiar heights on the excellent *Soldiers*, as if to remind casual listeners whose album they had just bought.

Strength and sheen notwithstanding, it was still the Bee Gees in 1981, so reviews followed the herd rather than listened dispassionately, radio refused the singles, and it all tanked. Bee Gees spent the next four years writing for others.

MATTHEW RUDD

© Andreas Blank

ANDY BELL'S TEN CROWNS RETURNS AS FOUR-DISC SET

Erasure frontman Andy Bell will release an expanded four-disc boxset of his latest solo album, *Ten Crowns*, on 12 December via Crown Recordings

Packaged in a gold-foiled box, the limited-edition release features new sleevenotes and previously unseen photos by Sean Black.

Disc One is the original *Ten Crowns* LP alongside unreleased tracks, including a cover of the Olivia Newton-John and ELO hit *Xanadu*.

Described by *Classic Pop* as "stuffed with gigantic pop moments", *Ten Crowns* originally featured 10 new tracks, including Bell's collaboration with Debbie Harry (*Heart's A Liar*) and the BBC Radio 2 playlisted single, *Don't Cha Know*.

ANDY BELL THE CROWN JEWELS

The second disc, *Ten Crowns Remixed*, collates remixes by different artists for each track from the original album and includes Vince Clarke's reflective reimagining of *Dance For Mercy*, recently described by Bell as "a masterclass in synth futurism".

Ten Crowns Extended, the third disc, boasts extended versions of each track from the original record created by Dave Audé, who produced and co-wrote the LP.

The fourth and final disc, *Ten Crowns Live*, compiles live recordings of tracks from Bell's tour, which has so far travelled through the UK and Europe, and is currently in North America.

For further information and to order *The Crown Jewels* box, visit andybell.com.

MARR SET TO BOWL OVER HOMETOWN CROWD

Johnny Marr has announced his biggest-ever headline solo show to date: a homecoming performance at Manchester's Castlefield Bowl on 9 July 2026.

The support act for the legendary guitarist will be fellow Mancunians Everything Everything, whose Get To Heaven Tour returns to the UK on 27 November before heading to Australia.

The news follows the release of *Look Out Live!*, the 22-track album recorded at Johnny's sold-out headline show at London's Hammersmith Apollo in 2024.

The in-demand six-stringer has also recorded four new songs with Gorillaz for the group's upcoming LP *The Mountain* and recently teamed up with Franz Ferdinand on their single *Build It Up*.

For further information and to book tickets, visit johnnymarr.com.

© Kristen Bourdeau

MIKE JOYCE

THE DRUMS: MY LIFE IN THE SMITHS

- IN CONVERSATION -

01.11 **LEEDS** OLD WOOLLEN
04.11 **NEWCASTLE** WYLAM
05.11 **GLASGOW** GLEE
06.11 **MANCHESTER** STOLLER HALL
07.11 **CARDIFF** THE GATE
11.11 **NOTTINGHAM** METRONOME
13.11 **BIRMINGHAM** GLEE
15.11 **BRIGHTON** KOMEDIA MATINEE
16.11 **BATH** KOMEDIA MATINEE

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS & PUTMAN PUBLISHING PRESENTATION

dreadzone
VS
orb

CO-HEADLINE TOUR 2025

14.11 **LEEDS PROJECT HOUSE**
15.11 **GLASGOW QMU**
28.11 **BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE**
29.11 **BRISTOL ELECTRIC BRISTOL**
05.12 **MANCHESTER NEW CENTURY HALL**
06.12 **LONDON ELECTRIC BRIXTON**

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS PRESENTATION

IT'S GREAT WHEN YOU'RE STRAIGHT, YEAH

BLACK GRAPE
IT'S GREAT WHEN YOU'RE STRAIGHT YEAH
Central Station Design

with special guests

dodgy

30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE CLASSIC ALBUM

SOLD OUT Glasgow, QMU
Sat 29 Nov Newcastle, NX
Thu 04 Dec Sheffield, Leadmill
Fri 05 Dec Wolverhampton, Wulfrun Hall
Sat 06 Dec Bristol, Electric
Thu 11 Dec Southampton, Engine Rooms
Fri 12 Dec Brighton, Chalk LOW TICKETS
Sat 13 Dec London, Electric Brixton
SOLD OUT Norwich, Waterfront
Fri 19 Dec Nottingham, The Level
Sat 20 Dec Manchester, Academy

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH ILA

Young Knives

LANDFILL TOUR : PART II

THURSDAY 18 DECEMBER
SCALA
LONDON

the Fratellis

Celebrating 20 years of
Costello Music

plus special guests
THE CULPS

February 2026
Sold Out Nottingham, Rock City
Sold Out Cardiff, Great Hall
07 Eventim Apollo, Hammersmith LOW TICKETS
Sold Out Norwich, UEA
10 Lincoln, Engine Shed
12 Liverpool, Olympia LOW TICKETS
Sold Out Manchester, Albert Hall
14 Wolverhampton, Civic Hall
16 Portsmouth, Guildhall
17 Southend, Cliffs Pavilion
Sold Out Leeds, O2 Academy
Sold Out Newcastle, NX

Additional Dates Added Due to Demand
Sold Out Manchester, Albert Hall
23 Bristol, Prospect Building
24 Newcastle, NX
Sold Out Glasgow, O2 Academy
Sold Out Glasgow, O2 Academy

A Crosstown Concerts presentation by
arrangement with Motion Agency

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS, DF CONCERTS & MCD PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH MOTION

Gene

NEW AMUSEMENTS

28.09.25 LEEDS, BRUDENELL* SOLD OUT
02.10.25 SHEFFIELD, NETWORK* SOLD OUT
04.10.25 LONDON, EVENTIM APOLLO*▲ SOLD OUT
05.03.26 NOTTINGHAM, ROCK CITY
06.03.26 GLASGOW, BARROWLANDS
14.03.26 BRISTOL, BEACON
25.03.26 DUBLIN, 3OLYMPIA
26.03.26 MANCHESTER, ALBERT HALL

▲ ANDY BUSH
(ABSOLUTE RADIO DJ SET)

* DANNY & THE CHAMPIONS OF THE WORLD
(ACOUSTIC)

Ian Peel's A to Z of POP

HOW DO YOU JOIN ONE ALBUM PROJECT OR ERA WITH THE NEXT, EVEN IF YOU'RE TURNING A PAGE, STARTING A NEW CHAPTER, OR EVEN SHEDDING YOUR SKIN?

P IS FOR... PIVOT(AL) SINGLES

The rarely-spotted classic pop phenomena of the pivot single has helped many a group springboard from one era to the next. It's something I've been thinking about since I bought Tears For Fears' *Head Over Heels* on 7" in 1985. It came with a free poster that folded out to show every single they'd released up to that point. And there it was, the release that connected the origin story of *The Hurting* with their Hollywood story of *Songs From The Big Chair – The Way You Are*.

While Curt Smith has gone on record many times to say he's not a fan of the track, Roland Orzabal's recollection is more pertinent, having described it as "the point we realised we had to change direction". To me, that means it's a single I have to hear and revisit from time to time. It may not have the grandeur of *...Big Chair* or the energy of *The Hurting* but with its artwork that reflects both eras (and complementary 7" and 12" designs) it's like listening in to the duo's history book right at the moment that it was being rewritten.

Dexys Midnight Runners turned the 'strategic pivot' into an artform: the two singles that appeared between their *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels* debut album and 1982's monumental *Too-Rye-Ay*. Put 1981's *Plan B* on the turntable, or its follow-up, *Show Me*, and you hear a band on the brink of reinvention and amid a period that everyone wishes – both inside the group and out – hadn't been so fleeting.

DEXYS TURNED THE 'STRATEGIC PIVOT' INTO AN ARTFORM: THE TWO SINGLES THAT APPEARED BETWEEN THEIR *SEARCHING FOR THE YOUNG SOUL REBELS* AND 1982'S MONUMENTAL *TOO-RYE-AY*

OMD surprised us in 1991 with a split, line-up change, rethink and reboot. It came after the maturity (and some might even say predictability) of *The Pacific Age*. But what would they have sounded like if they'd continued forging into America, and carried on with Paul Humphreys, Martin Cooper and Malcolm Holmes?

The answer is there, tucked away in the history books – or rather discographies – of 1988 and the pivotal single of *Dreaming*, not least the 10" mix by William Orbit.

So many more examples spring to mind. Like The The's *Dis-Infected* EP. It led to a *Top Of The Pops* appearance and was the perfect follow-up to the *Dusk* album.

But did it point to the future, as we thought at the time? Not exactly. Turns out it was actually the pivot to *Hanky Panky*, an album of Hank Williams cover versions and more than a decade of silence...

And let's not forget Haircut One Hundred's follow-up single to the *Pelican West* album. I thought I could see how it would look and sound for album number two when standalone release *Nobody's Fool* landed. But just a few months later they'd changed vocalist and refined their sound into a beautiful Balearic direction, though without the hits.

Some groups have even been known to pivot mid-single.

When ABC released 1985's *Vanity Kills* in the UK it was at the height of their *Zillionaire* era: a one-of-a-kind self-contained pop micro-genre.

But when they got around to releasing it in the US, they were ready to leave all that behind and trail what was to come next with the *Alphabet City* project: they restyled themselves, their line-up and their image, remixing the single from agit-anime into sax-driven sophistication.

Blink and you might have missed it, like all the pivot(al) singles of the classic pop cannon. But sift back through history and they're an absorbing gateway into an alternate, imaginary timeline. ■

OBITUARY

D'ANGELO

11 FEBRUARY 1974 –
14 OCTOBER 2025

Neo-soul pioneer D'Angelo died on 14 October at the age of 51 after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

In a statement that was shared with *Variety*, the family of the acclaimed singer-songwriter who was born Michael Eugene Archer wrote: "The shining star of our family has dimmed his light for us in this life.

"We are eternally grateful for the legacy of extraordinarily moving music he leaves behind. We ask that you respect our privacy during this difficult time but invite you all to join us in mourning his passing while also celebrating the gift of song that he has left for the world."

A groundbreaking force in the neo-soul movement of the 90s, D'Angelo quickly rose to prominence with his debut album, *Brown Sugar* (1995), which produced three UK hit singles: the title track peaking at No.24, *Cruisin'* (No.31) and *Lady* (No.21).

His follow-up album, *Voodoo* (2000), received critical acclaim and made No.21 on the UK Albums Chart. Following a period away from the spotlight, the star returned with *Black Messiah* in 2014.

Despite a relatively small back catalogue, D'Angelo's work left an enduring mark on music, and those three studio albums won four Grammy Awards.

Beyoncé, Nile Rodgers, Lauryn Hill and Missy Elliott were among the many artists who paid their respects online.

On her website, Beyoncé wrote: "We thank you for your beautiful music, your voice, your proficiency on the piano, your artistry. You were the pioneer of neo-soul, and that changed and transformed R&B forever. We will never forget you."

Taking to social media, Rodgers recalled meeting and hearing D'Angelo's music for the first time: "At the end of the encounter he asked me, 'What should I do with it?' I remember this as if it were yesterday. I said, 'Put it out. It's perfect!'... About a year later I heard one of those songs on the radio. It was genius... RIP my brother."

Fellow neo-soul star Hill said: "I regret not having more time with you. Your undeniable beauty and talent were not of this world, and a presence not of this world needs protection in a world that covets light and the anointing of God. You, sir, moved us, stirred us, inspired and even intimidated others to action with your genius. Thank you for being a beacon of light..."

"Rest peacefully, D'Angelo," shared Missy Elliott on X. "No parent wants to see their children go, but it's painful for children to see their parents go, too."

D'Angelo is survived by three children: Michael, Morocco and daughter Imani Archer.

Ocean and Pellow set to join forces

Billy Ocean will be joined by former Wet Wet Wet singer Marti Pellow on a UK tour next summer.

One of Britain's most enduring artists, Ocean has sold more than 30 million records worldwide. With a career spanning more than five decades, his distinctive blend of pop and soul has brought him a wealth of Gold and Platinum albums, chart-topping singles across the globe and numerous awards.

Pellow has enjoyed a successful solo career since leaving The Wets and earned acclaim on the musical theatre stage, starring in *Chicago*, *Evita*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *Blood Brothers* and *Chess*.

The tour opens at Leigh Sports Village Stadium on 29 May, before headlining venues including TK Maxx Presents Live at Lincoln Castle, Southampton Summer Sessions, Live at Llangollen Pavilion, Scarborough Open Air Theatre and Live at The Piece Hall. For more information, visit billyocean.com.

Happy
Mondays

MONDAYS GEMS GET SINGLED OUT

© Tom Sheehan

Happy Mondays will kickstart a year of 40th anniversary celebrations with a new compilation, *The Factory Singles*, out on 5 December via London Records.

The collection captures the band's output from 1985 to 1992. *The Factory Singles* will be available across multiple formats – including 2LP, 2CD, cassette and a 1LP Blood Records Exclusive.

The artwork has been conceived by members of the band's original design team from Central Station, Pat Carroll and Karen Jackson alongside Sam Carroll.

Next March, the Mondays will celebrate the 35th anniversary of *Pills 'N' Thrills And Bellyaches* with an extensive UK tour.

Support comes from original 1991 tourmates The Farm and Northside. Turn to page 13 for our Q&A interview with Northside's frontman Warren "Dermo" Dermody.

This month in POP

DECEMBER 1982

THE JAM CALL IT A DAY, TONI BASIL HITS THE TOP AND BOWIE'S BING CROSBY PAIR-UP FINALLY GETS SOME FESTIVE CHART ACTION

STEVE O'BRIEN

ABBA
UNDER ATTACK
YOU OWE ME ONE

03 ABBA release their No.26-charting single *Under Attack*. Lifted from their *The Singles: The First Ten Years* compilation album, it would be the final 45 issued by the Swedes for nearly 40 years.

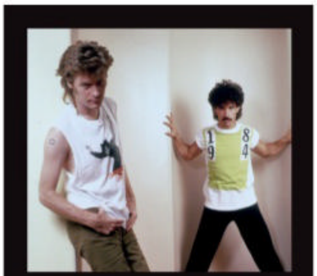
04 Following an appearance on the first episode of *The Tube*, The Jam entered the UK chart at No.1 with *Beat Surrender*, their final single. Seven days later, they played their last gig together at the Brighton Conference Centre.

THE JAM
BEAT
SURRENDER
BEAT SURRENDER
SHOPPING

08 Nicki Minaj is born in the Saint James district of Port of Spain. Her debut LP, *Pink Friday*, achieved the largest sales week of any female rap album of the 21st century.

11 Singer and dancer Toni Basil hits No.1 in the US with *Mickey*, a renamed cover (originally titled *Kitty*) of an old Racey album track.

TONI BASIL
Mickey



18 Hall & Oates, in happier times, begin a four-week run at No.1 in the US with *Maneater*, a song that peaks at No.6 in the UK.

18 Renée & Renato top the British charts with *Save Your Love*. The duo's sole Top 40 entry stays at the pinnacle of the hit parade for four consecutive weeks and claims the year's much-coveted Christmas No.1.

29 Jamaica issues a Bob Marley postage stamp to honour his cultural impact and role in bringing reggae to the world. Since then, at least a dozen other countries have done the same.

31 The 11th annual *Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve* special airs on US TV and includes appearances by Hall & Oates, Jermaine Jackson, Barry Manilow and The Go-Go's, the latter play their hit *We Got The Beat*.

© Alamy

25

While Renée & Renato enjoyed the Christmas No.1 spot in the UK, a more traditionally festive song was cresting at No.3 by the unlikely pairing of David Bowie and Bing Crosby.

The idea of having the Chameleon of Pop team up with this septuagenarian balladeer for a reimagined version of the 1941 standard *The Little Drummer Boy* was an inspired one. Recorded for the Yuletide television special *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas* in September 1977, it remained unreleased until 1982 and would subsequently become one of Bowie's best-selling singles.

The original plan had been for the pair to sing *The Little Drummer Boy* in its original form, but Bowie baulked at the idea, leading to the show's musical supervisors, Ian Fraser and Larry Grossman, speedily coming up with a new section ("Peace on Earth can it be?/ Years from now, perhaps we'll see?") for the singer. Watching the footage now, they still look like a monumentally strange pairing, but according to Crosby's daughter Mary, the clip could have looked even odder. "The doors opened and David walked in with his wife," she recalled to *Billboard* of Bowie's arrival at Elstree Studios. "They were both wearing full-length mink coats, they have matching full makeup and their hair was bright red. We were thinking, 'Oh my god.'" According to her brother Nathanial: "I think the producers told him to take the lipstick off and take the earring out. It was just incredible to see the contrast."

DAVID BOWIE & BING CROSBY
Peace on Earth/Little Drummer Boy

Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas aired on 24 December 1977 on ITV and featured guest spots from Twiggy, Ron Moody and Stanley Baxter. By this time, Crosby had already passed away, having suffered a fatal heart attack on a golf course in Spain just a month after his headline-grabbing duet.

TOP 5 UK ALBUMS CHART

19 DECEMBER 1982

❶ **THE JOHN LENNON COLLECTION**
JOHN LENNON

JOHN LENNON
Collection

❷ **THE SINGLES – THE FIRST TEN YEARS**
ABBA

ABBA
The Singles
The First Ten Years

❸ **DIG THE NEW BREED**
THE JAM

THE JAM
Dig The New Breed

❹ **RIO**
DURAN DURAN

DURAN DURAN
RIO

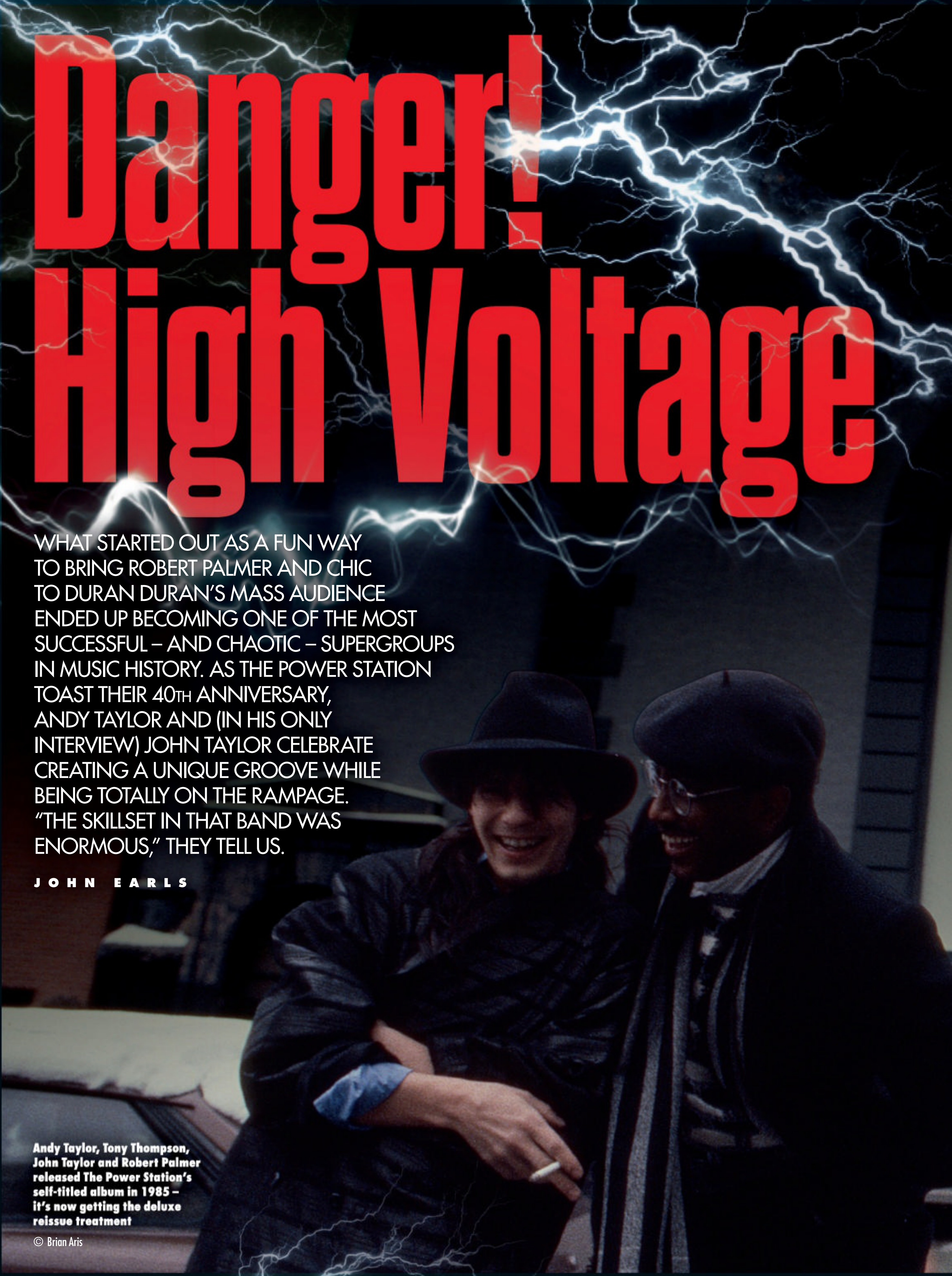
❺ **LOVE SONGS**
DIANA ROSS

DIANA ROSS · LOVE SONGS

Danger! High Voltage

WHAT STARTED OUT AS A FUN WAY TO BRING ROBERT PALMER AND CHIC TO DURAN DURAN'S MASS AUDIENCE ENDED UP BECOMING ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL – AND CHAOTIC – SUPERGROUPS IN MUSIC HISTORY. AS THE POWER STATION TOAST THEIR 40TH ANNIVERSARY, ANDY TAYLOR AND (IN HIS ONLY INTERVIEW) JOHN TAYLOR CELEBRATE CREATING A UNIQUE GROOVE WHILE BEING TOTALLY ON THE RAMPAGE. "THE SKILLSET IN THAT BAND WAS ENORMOUS," THEY TELL US.

JOHN EARLS



Andy Taylor, Tony Thompson, John Taylor and Robert Palmer released The Power Station's self-titled album in 1985 – it's now getting the deluxe reissue treatment

© Brian Aris

If you want to encapsulate just how huge Andy Taylor and John Taylor were in the summer of 1985, consider this: when Live Aid took place in July, Duran Duran's Bond theme *A View To A Kill* was at No.1 Stateside. Their new band, The Power Station, were at No.18 with a cover of T. Rex's *Get It On (Bang A Gong)* and was on its way to the US Top 10, where their debut single *Some Like It Hot* had hit a few weeks previous.

At the time, John was 25 and Andy 24. John's explanation for forming another band with Andy – roping in Robert Palmer and Chic drummer Tony Thompson – is simple: "We just wanted to rock." In their view, the delicate balance between pop and rock in Duran had swung too far towards pop on the band's most recent album, *Seven And The Ragged Tiger*. John laughs: "To be basic, Andy and I both felt we needed to express a bit of grunt."

Andy, meanwhile, is determined to remind Duran fans of a more practical reason why a second band was possible in the first place: Simon Le Bon's yacht Drum. Duran Duran might have been the biggest band in the world in 1985, but their singer's decision to take part in the Fastnet yacht race that August meant the rest of the group suddenly had excess time on their hands. "I have to constantly remind people that a certain singer took off on a boat for a year," cackles Andy. "It meant there was a little bit of a gap."

The guitarist bursts out laughing whenever Drum is mentioned, but it should be noted it's fond laughter. Forty years on, Andy can afford to smile about how Duran's singer was trapped underwater when his yacht capsized. Still, if Le Bon hadn't been so keen on seafaring adventures, one of music's most successful supergroups might never have happened.

The Power Station's three singles *Some Like It Hot*, *Get It On* and *Communication* all made the Billboard Top 40

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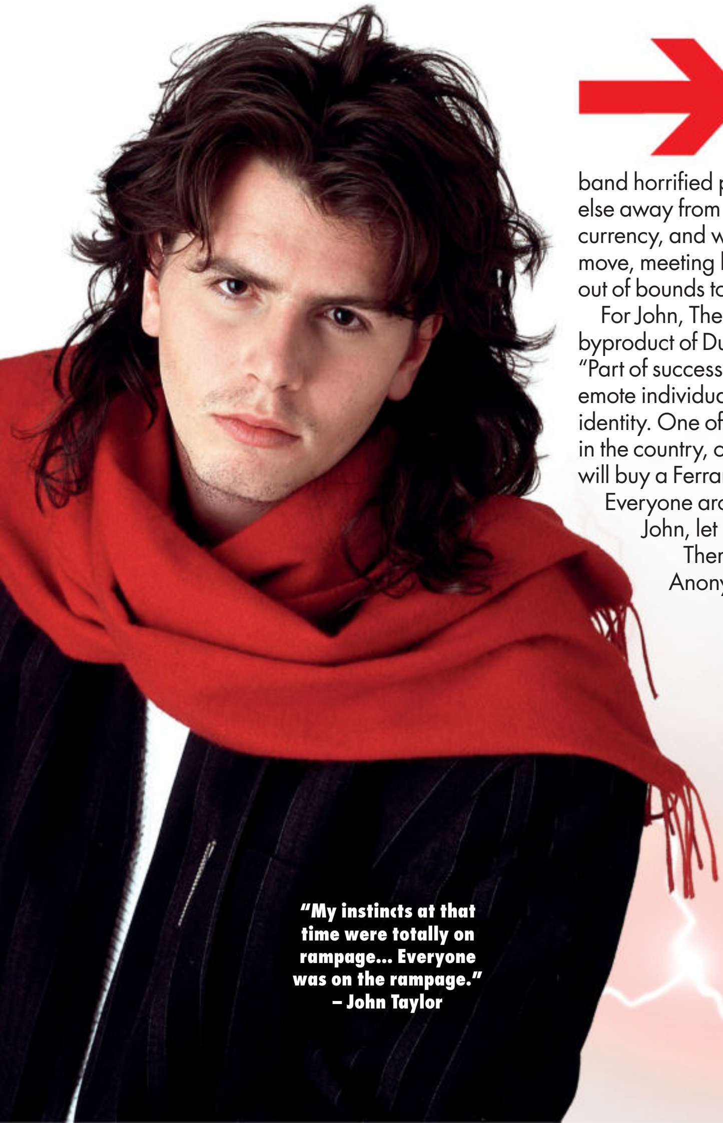


"My instincts at that time were totally on rampage... Everyone was on the rampage." – John Taylor

"Everything was firing for us," says Andy. "It was our moment when we were able to get shit done. The thought of another band horrified people, doing something else away from Duran. But we had a lot of currency, and we were constantly on the move, meeting loads of people. Nothing was out of bounds to challenge our limitations."

For John, The Power Station was a natural byproduct of Duran's power. He considers: "Part of success is that everyone gets to emote individually and grow their own identity. One of the band will buy a house in the country, one in Mayfair. One of you will buy a Ferrari, one a Land Rover. Everyone around you says: 'Absolutely, John, let me do that for you, John.'"

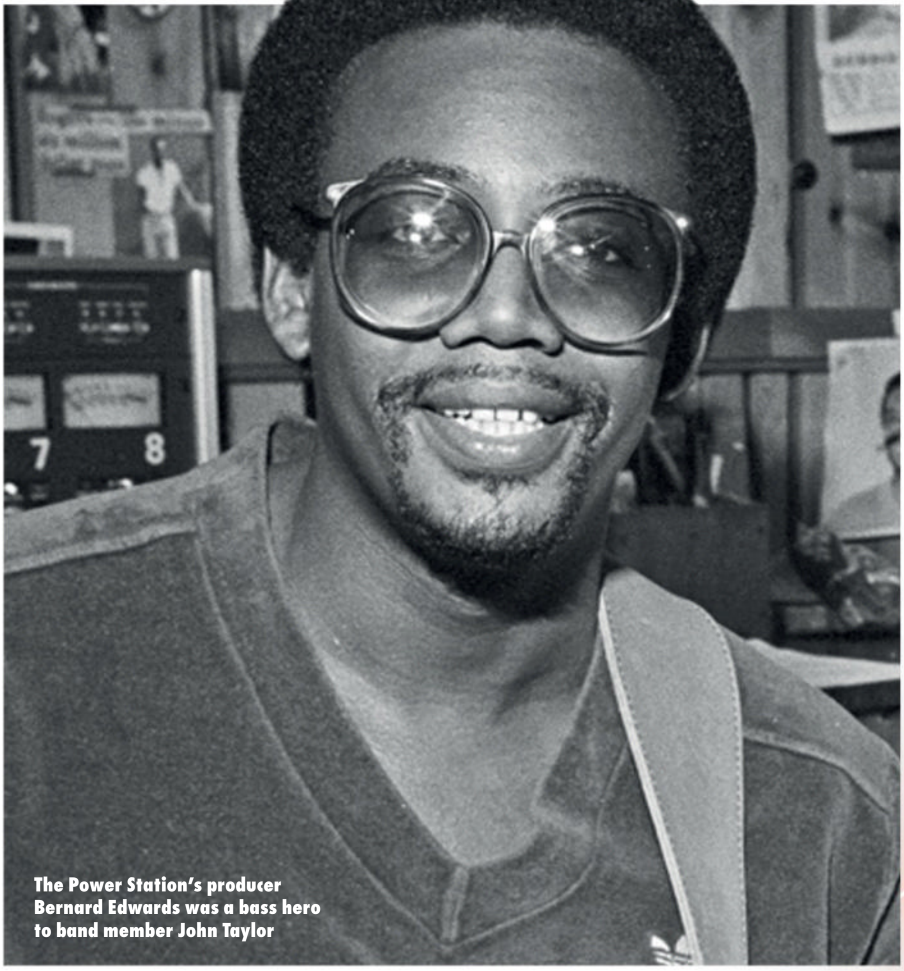
There's a saying in Alcoholics Anonymous – an organisation John would later become familiar with – which states: "Instincts on rampage baulk upon investigation..." John repeats the phrase and laughs: "My instincts at that time were totally on rampage."

WILD BOYS

Duran's internal tensions weren't helped by either Drum or The Power Station, as John remembers: "I was doing what the fuck I liked, while Simon was doing what the fuck he liked, sailing his boat around. I'd tell Simon: 'What are you doing? You're the fucking singer and you're putting all our careers at risk!' and he would tell me: 'What are you talking about? You've formed another fucking band with another fucking singer!' Everyone was on the rampage."

The "other fucking singer" was, of course, the debonair Robert Palmer, while their drummer was Tony Thompson, whose potent

> "We had a lot of currency and we were constantly on the move, meeting loads of people. Nothing was out of bounds to challenge our limitations."
>
> ANDY TAYLOR



The Power Station's producer Bernard Edwards was a bass hero to band member John Taylor

Robert Palmer had supported Duran Duran at their first UK stadium show

playing brought to life the ideas of Chic leaders Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards on their mighty singles.

Initially, John, Andy and Tony – befriended when they met backstage in France while Thompson was drumming on David Bowie's Serious Moonlight Tour – were simply going to back John's new girlfriend Bebe Buell on a cover of *Get It On* that John planned to produce for the supermodel. "I fell out with Bebe, but the idea stayed," smiles John.

Duran's success made it easier to approach potential bandmates but, as Andy points out, the band had been driven from day one. "From the start, we were deadly serious about what we were trying to achieve," he insists. "Then we got to the level where, if we said we were going to do something, we had an entire organisation which would follow, and none of us had stepped out in this way before."

Andy believes Thompson's role in Chic is undervalued, saying: "I always thought Tony deserved a little more credit in Chic than he got. When you listen to those grooves, there's a happiness to what Tony does, an optimism in his playing." John agrees: "Duran were a club band. We loved spending time in clubs, and Tony was one of our favourite musicians to hear in them. We all loved his playing on *Upside Down* for Diana Ross, *Believer*, Debbie Harry's *Backfired*. Tony could stretch out as a drummer, doing these amazing breaks, and you always knew in a club when it was Tony playing on a song."

In New York on Duran business, the Taylors met Thompson, who introduced them to Bernard Edwards. As John says: "Nile's career was skyrocketing. He'd produced Bowie and was in the middle of working with Madonna on *Like A Virgin*. Of course, we had done *The Wild Boys* with Nile, who by now was bigger as an individual than he had been in Chic. Bernard had only released one solo album, which hadn't done anything, so he was very much in the shadows. Then Tony told us: 'Bernard is the secret weapon in Chic.' He insisted we meet Bernard."

RAISING THEIR GAME

It helped that Edwards was John's hero as a bassist. "Bernard didn't make a thing out of that," smiles John. "He found me amusing and kept things down to earth. He was always: 'Don't stop practicing, John!' Everyone was able to maximise their personality. We all stood back to let each of us take turns on the bonfire. The elders in Tony, Bernard and Robert played really well with the kids, me and Andy. And we let the elders do what they do."

Andy is similarly full of praise for Edwards but admits: "Bernard had an instant ear for what was and wasn't cool. It meant you had to be instantly prepared. I did a solo once, ripping it up, and Bernard just looked at me: '*That's* your fucking solo?' This was late at night, and, the next morning, Bernard was: 'Let's do that solo again…' He wouldn't torture you with it, but you had to raise your game. There's no click-track or metronome

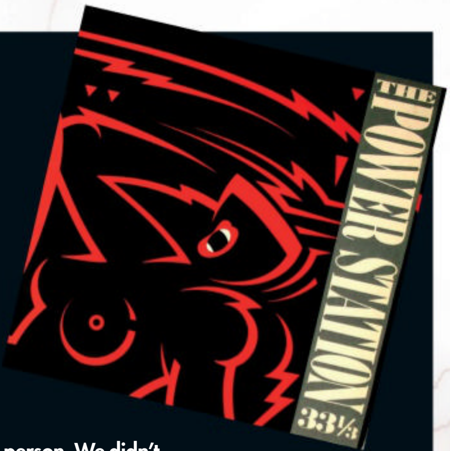
NAKED AMBITION

Despite the power of the band's collective image, the sleeve of *The Power Station* was a painting. Young Spanish artist Montxo Algora's work was spotted by John in "a coffee table art book doing the rounds at the time, with a lot of semi-pornographic artworks."

Helped by Frank Olinsky, who later designed Duran Duran's *Notorious* sleeve, John carried Algora's image throughout The Power Station's sleeve and videos. John explains: "The woman in that image became a symbol for the band, a god of some kind."

In the videos, this goddess figure was played by trans model Caroline Cossey, who appeared in the 1981 James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only*. "Caroline fitted John's vision perfectly," says Andy. "Caroline was stunning, a really lovely person. We didn't publicise that she was trans, because the reason Caroline was there is because she worked with the art.

"We weren't trying to be trendy in working with a trans model, it was just how we lived. There were a lot of gay and trans people at Rum Runner, so it's what coloured our life."



The Power Station was named after the studio in New York where the band's debut album was recorded

© Brian Aris

Power chord: Andy Taylor performs with The Power Station at the Poplar Creek Music Theater, Illinois, on 13 August 1985

on The Power Station, none of that. It was purely from instinct." Of John's hero worshipping of Edwards, Andy chuckles: "It was as if I was making an album produced by Jeff Beck. Sitting next to Bernard would be an experience for any bass player."

The Power Station's initial plan was for the Taylors and Thompson to be a house band in the vein of Stax Records for a cast of guest singers. Although Mick Jagger, Billy Idol and The Psychedelic Furs' Richard Butler's names have been rumoured, John and Andy are both hazy on the exact details, beyond confirming Chic's backing singers – who had sung on *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* – were considered. Andy ponders: "Billy Idol would never have been viable then. Mick Jagger was downstairs from us when we recorded the album, but we already had Robert by then. Jeff Beck was recording upstairs, and I'd have liked that. But singer names was only ever: 'He or him might be a good idea', nothing serious. I don't think me or John were ever really that into the idea of lots of singers."

Coinciding with more Duran duties in Paris, the new trio jammed their cover of *Get It On* and built up the instrumental of what became *Some Like It Hot*, which they subsequently sent to Robert Palmer. All of Duran loved Palmer, who had supported the band during their Birmingham homecoming at Aston Villa's ground in July 1983.

John first met Palmer in 1982 at New York's The Peppermint Lounge, when Duran's publicist Doreen D'Agostino brought Robert to a Duran party. "Talk about *Get It On*," grins John. "Robert and I, we really fucking got it *on*." That's a hint about Palmer's louche partying ways echoed by Andy, who had already met Robert at Steve Strange's squat the year before, where Palmer was "really off his head".

"Robert's songs *Looking For Clues* and *Johnny And Mary* were massive for me," enthuses John. "When Duran were making *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* in the south of France, I was totally into *Double Fun*. I was a massive fan, yet also able to meet Robert on equal terms. He was probably struck by my beautiful naivety, while Robert was a musically deep northerner, just like Andy."

DANCE INTO THE FIRE

Before they could get it on in the studio, however, John and Andy had to return to the day job, for the small matter of making a Bond theme. "That was challenging," deadpans Andy. Not only were Duran barely on speaking terms, they were contractually obliged to let John Barry co-write the theme –

Duran Duran, pictured below with Grace Jones and Tanya Roberts, wrote the theme for *A View To A Kill* with composer John Barry (inset)

> “I was a massive Robert Palmer fan, yet able to meet him on equal terms. He was probably struck by my beautiful naivety…”
>
> JOHN TAYLOR

and contend with the fact that the James Bond bosses thought Duran Duran were a bunch of disposable pop herberts. “We charmed our way in,” reckons Andy. “The size of our fanbase meant the studio was persuaded. They were very ‘Hmmm’ about us at first.”

A View To A Kill began as “a little chord thing” that Barry played at John Taylor’s home; what Andy describes as: “The beginning of something that could work.” The composer continued to craft small motifs that could be assembled into a song… only Duran had no producer to make that happen. Nile Rodgers was too busy with Madonna so, before actually producing any Power Station music, Bernard Edwards was flown to Maison Rouge studio in Fulham.

“Duran getting into the studio was a little difficult at the time,” acknowledges Andy. “But Bernard was very stoic, so I knew he’d be good for us. Whatever bullshit was thrown at Bernard, he could handle it: he’d dealt with Diana Ross. Bernard was always on it, so he’d be great at whatever bullshit was going on.”

There was, however, a more unexpected layer of extra bullshit: John Barry. “We didn’t know John had had four heart attacks,” Andy grimaces. “As soon as he’d thrown his song ideas at us, it was: ‘Right, off to the pub!’ John wasn’t supposed to drink, but there he was, happy as Larry, pissed.”

Edwards did indeed help keep everything together, sorting the orchestration while Andy and Roger Taylor created a hybrid of Linn drum samples. Meanwhile, Andy recalls of Barry: “Nick didn’t necessarily see eye-to-eye with him. That’s perfectly understandable, because John was a little… intolerant.”

Andy summarises *A View To A Kill* as: “A hard song to make, but one which turned out amazing. It was the first Bond theme to make No.1, and it’s still the biggest selling. Bond is so huge, but we still have the gold medal. Our view was: ‘If we’re doing a Bond song, let’s nail it.’ We had the pop sensibility in droves of positioning the chorus right.”

LET’S GET IT ON

While at Maison Rouge, Andy and John worked up *Communication*, with Palmer writing its lyrics on the plane over to New York to record his vocals for *Some Like It Hot*. It’s a song largely about The Power Station’s ethos, as John explains: “It’s about connectivity. Anybody who’s got drunk knows what it’s like to hit it off with somebody you’ve just met, then think the next morning: ‘We really got it on… or did we?’ That can be with a woman, but it’s often how boys bond, too, over substances. The question then is: Was it just a one night stand? *Communication* was Robert saying: ‘No, really, I’m in!’ At the mic in New York, Robert knocked out *Communication* in one.”

That made it three tracks, with *Murderess* a “banging” Palmer song title he worked up, John “plonking *Still In Your Heart* on the piano” and Edwards instigating *Lonely Tonight*. Add in Palmer’s *Go To Zero* and Andy suggesting a cover of The Isley Brothers’ *Harvest For The World* and, as John says: “Voila, there’s the album! The key to making it is that all those ideas were maximised by their production, each idea taken to its ultimate conclusion by Bernard and our engineer, Jason Corsaro, who was also hugely key to The Power Station.”

Andy, too, cites Corsaro, additionally stressing the importance of the session musicians who worked on the album. “The players on that album are absolutely sterling,” eulogises Andy. “Man, the tightness of those players! Those guys had incredible timing. The sharpness and the pop in the timing on that record was one in a million.”

As exemplified on *Some Like It Hot*, the sound of The Power Station’s

LIVE AID’S DOUBLE SHIFT

In 1985, both Duran Duran and The Power Station played at Live Aid’s Philadelphia concert.

On meeting “The Parisian Arcadia contingent” of Simon Le Bon, Nick Rhodes and Roger Taylor, John recalls: “It was hugs, going into a rehearsal room and trying to come up with a four-song set. We were No.1 in America, but barely speaking to each other.”

While reflecting on Duran’s live appearance, he says: “Our relationship was so tenuous then, but I love that performance.

“I didn’t watch it for 20 years but, when I finally did, I thought: ‘This is incredible!’ It was the big band version of Duran: horns, percussion, backing vocals.”

At the time, Andy Taylor was livid that Duran had to follow the reformed Led Zeppelin: “I was cursing the promoter, Bill Graham, for our slot. I stood at the side of the stage with a popcorn bucket full of ice and white wine, thinking: ‘Bastard!’ Even though Duran were No.1 at the time, that crowd wanted Led Zeppelin. It didn’t matter Zeppelin were a shambles, because the place went nuts.

“Live Aid was crazy, but it was a fun day. Everyone had a party. I’d never seen everyone’s guard come down so much. Eric Clapton was lovely; he helped me back onto the bus afterwards.”

John, Tony and Andy with Michael Des Barres, who stepped in for Robert Palmer

self-titled album was a minimal, spare way of getting across a mighty groove. "It's very stripped, very bare and it's sensitive to all its individual parts," summarises Andy. "It's also a sound no-one had done before. That's one thing I like when I look back to Duran and The Power Station: we created the sound of a band people loved."

John is more modest about the achievement, saying: "Whereas Duran came out of the New Romantic grounding, The Power Station had a broader spectrum of influences. People like Rod Stewart listened to our album and thought: 'OK, this is how I can get back into the game.' We assembled the ingredients, but nobody knew what it was going to sound like. Bernard and Jason's production team took it way beyond anything any of us imagined."

With Palmer a suave contrast to the Taylors' voguish look and Thompson adding a further layer of NY cool, The Power Station were immediately one of the hippest bands around. That was brought home to John at the band's first photo session with Eric Boman – chosen because he'd photographed Roxy Music's *Country Life* cover. "Going into Eric's studio was the first time we went, 'Oh, so we *are* a band!'," remembers John. "What I'd learned with Duran is that, in a band, you create a cast of characters. We'd always tell interviewers: 'We're like a box of Quality Street: everyone is someone's favourite.' The Power Station was even more like that, because there were such extremes of personality."

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John Taylor considers Robert Palmer's *Riptide* LP as "a companion album to *The Power Station*"

PAYING IT FORWARD

That The Power Station became so successful, especially in the States, started out as an accident. Andy recalls: "It was a lot freer than Duran. This wasn't: 'Let's make something for the American Top 40.' When it started to smell that way, we had the guys to make it happen. But initially The Power Station didn't have that, because it's what we were already doing in Duran. We weren't dead set on getting three hits out of that album, and one thing people enjoyed about the album is that it's so different. It's not just: 'Can you sing the chorus?'"

John believes a certain amount of dues were being paid in the band to his and Andy's heritage. "There was a little bit of flexing in introducing Robert, Bernard and Tony to Duran's mass audience," he considers. "When you're super-successful, you get to produce your old schoolfriend's song, or you rediscover an old artist, like David Bowie taking Dana Gillespie and Lulu into the studio. That paying it forward payback is fun."

The original Power Station line-up didn't get to capitalise on that success. After one TV appearance on *Saturday Night Live* – "I love that performance, we look so different to how we sound," says John – The Power Station's tour was in chaos when Palmer quit two weeks before the first night. John points to Palmer's subsequent LP *Riptide* – which featured *Addicted To Love* – as "a companion album to *The Power Station*" in its timing, and for featuring all of The Power Station bar John, as well as their session musicians. Andy is more damning of Palmer's departure, fuming: "I don't know what Robert was running from. There were a lot of strange people around him, giving Robert whisky-fuelled advice."

Either way, Michael Des Barres instead sang on the tour: his band Chequered Past had supported Duran. "There wasn't really

> **"In Duran we'd always tell interviewers: 'We're like a box of Quality Street: everyone is someone's favourite.' The Power Station was even more like that..."**
>
> JOHN TAYLOR

anyone else who could come in in time," admits Andy. "Michael had paid his dues and knew what he was doing." John adds: "Michael had a strong onstage personality, and he'd written Animotion's hit *Obsession*, so he had some currency and was fully committed to the idea."

Andy concludes of losing Palmer: "Michael stuck closely to Robert's vocals and we had two great backing singers. Michael wasn't Robert, who was one in a gazillion, but you've had people doing Freddie Mercury's job in Queen, so... I don't know how we pulled it off. Our view was simply: 'Fuck off, we're not going to stop.'"

NO-NO-NOTORIOUS

Ultimately, Des Barres' biggest influence in The Power Station was possibly being a reformed addict. During the tour, John and Andy's substance intake made it, well, notorious. "Any excuse to go out on tour was great fun," considers Andy. "I had nothing else to do that summer. So what's a young man to do? That tour went from extremely clean to extremely dirty. There's levels of hedonism, and we weren't as bad as some, not by a country mile."

John offers: "Oh, that tour was messy... It was so messy that I was eating McDonalds every day, that's how fucking messy it was." Both Taylors praise Des Barres as a calming influence, as Andy says: "Michael was sober and dead straight. At that time, that was very valuable for us."

There was one final postscript for the period, when Des Barres used his film connections to land The Power Station a one-off single, *We Fight For Love*, on the soundtrack to Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Commando*. By then, as John admits: "It was the last fading embers of that time. Michael had the basis of the lyrics, and we knew the song would have that film placement. But I didn't care all that much."

Exhausted by the tour and fed up with how many cover versions it involved, John wanted to go back to Duran Duran. Andy did not. "Live Aid had been difficult," he assesses. "I'm glad I had the outlet of The Power Station then, because that was fun."

A LIFE OF VICE

The Power Station interrupted their tour to appear in an episode of *Miami Vice*, whose star Don Johnson was a good friend of Michael Des Barres.

"That was a fucking mad day," laughs Andy Taylor. "Hanging out in Miami with Don Johnson was the first time anyone in Duran Duran had hung out with someone more famous than we were. We went around Miami in an open-top car with Don. Everywhere we stopped, everyone would go: 'Aaargh! Don! Don!' I'd go: 'Look! It's me and John from Duran Duran here, too!'

"Don really was the guy you saw on screen. Doing the show was fun, one of those things done on a passing whim. The producers said: 'We want one of you to act,' so I told John: 'You're the one with a future in acting, off you go!'"

John takes up the theme, adding: "*Miami Vice* was *the* show to be seen on that summer. The list of guests they had is incredible. But I haven't seen our performance since we filmed it. I only had one line, which is the only time on that tour where I can say I only had one line."

The Power Station's "messy" live tour has gone down in pop lore for its hedonism

Immediately after Live Aid, Duran manager Michael Berrow told Andy that Roger Taylor was quitting. "That was the first time I knew there was a crack, that something really bad had happened," says Andy.

"When things were that difficult, the options of doing more Power Station or solo records became more of a reality. But, after that Power Station tour, I wasn't going to do that either.

"I'd never thought about getting into the music business for it to become a job, where I'd be told: 'Before you do anything, the expectancy is...' I felt like: 'I want to get off, but the roundabout won't slow down.'"

John was horrified at Andy's decision, admitting: "Andy was very calm, telling me: 'No, I'm not doing it.' I told him: 'What do you mean? I'm going back and we're together!' But Andy was very determined. I thought: 'Fuuuuck!' I thought that I might as well go back to Duran, as I was feeling the same at the end of that Power Station tour as I'd felt at the end of *Seven And The Ragged Tiger*.

"Clearly, *I* was the problem. But then Simon, Nick and I had the most amazing 12 months."

Forty years on, The Power Station's album still resonates as a formidable and deeply odd move from the biggest band on the planet. It's a total groove. And it's also undeniably by a supergroup, even if Andy and John Taylor ran a mile from the notion in 1985.

"We have had enough time now to see The Power Station for what it is," considers John. "Going back through the demos, I thought, 'Oh man, it really was a supergroup!' We made supergroups cool again. After us, you had bands like The Traveling Wilburys and Tin Machine. We reminded people that it was fun to be in a band."

"I've total respect for what everyone in that band did," summarises Andy. "The skillset of those people was enormous. I talked to John about it recently. And we both said: 'How did we pull *that* off?'" ■

● The 40th anniversary reissue of *The Power Station* is released via Warner on 23 January 2026 and will be reviewed in Issue 101

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Benny Andersson, Agnetha Fältskog, Björn Ulvaeus and Anni-Frid Lyngstad smile for the cameras during a short tour of Japan between recording sessions for *Super Trouper*

ABBA
Super Trouper

CLASSIC ALBUM

SUPER TROUPER

ABBA

SWEDEN'S NATIONAL TREASURES BROUGHT HEARTBREAK TO THE DANCEFLOOR ON THEIR IMPECCABLE SEVENTH ALBUM. WHILE THEIR PRIVATE LIVES WERE IN DISARRAY, IT WOULD BECOME THE UK'S BIGGEST-SELLING LP OF 1980.

FELIX ROWE

There couldn't be a more apt title for the seventh album by ABBA, then at the height of their powers, at the turn of the 80s. A registered brand of theatrical spotlight, the 'Super Trouper' is used to illuminate the stars on stage. As the biggest pop act on the planet, Benny, Björn, Agnetha and Frida were well accustomed to living life under the spotlight, with all eyes on them.

But such a privileged position is both a blessing and a curse. They may well have commanded the world's attention, but they couldn't escape the public gaze, whether on or off the stage. Professionally, they were still unstoppable; their private lives, however, were increasingly in disarray. Sweden's two power couples were in the process of a conscious uncoupling. Agnetha and Björn had split in January 1979, with the divorce finalised by July 1980. Meanwhile, Benny and Frida – though still smiling away for the cameras – would separate within three weeks of the album's release that same November.

It wasn't just the future of the group or their marriages at stake. During a 1979 US tour, their plane hit a tornado forcing an emergency landing – a sobering reminder of their own mortality. But celebrity status reached its most ugly conclusion around this time, when an anonymous kidnap threat on Agnetha and Björn's children brought to bear the true price of fame.

The spotlight theme, then, is an altogether darker metaphor. Beyond the superficial showbiz associations with glitz and glam, it represents an unwanted intrusion. All this real-life drama was playing out during the making and subsequent promotion of the record. The first verse of the album's opening title track sets out the stall: "I was sick and tired of everything/ When I called you last night from Glasgow/ All I do is eat and sleep and sing." And it gets worse: "Facing 20,000 of your friends/ How can anyone be so lonely?"

All things considered, it's remarkable just how uplifting and life-affirming the record sounds. *Super Trouper* is invariably described as one of ABBA's most cohesive and consistent albums. Across its 42 minutes, it's a lot more fun than it ought to be. It cements their position as a global institution: solid and dependable, though not infallible. Beneath the gloss and precision production, there's an unexpected vulnerability hiding in plain sight. Rather than doing what might be expected, putting on the brave face of a united front, they laid their troubles bare.

GO YOUR OWN WAY

Following the success of the disco-inflected global No.1, *Voulez-Vous,* ABBA were coming out of the 70s on top, yet very much associated with that decade. *Super Trouper*, by necessity, looks forward, asserting their presence on the 80s. It's a milestone they acknowledge on *Happy New Year*, though with a sense of longing and trepidation at what lies ahead. "Here we are, me and you/ Feeling lost and feeling blue/ It's the end of the party." (Another obvious allusion to Agnetha and Björn's separation.)

Some of *Super Trouper*'s songs began life as part of a planned musical by Benny and Björn, which ultimately didn't come to fruition. The pair started writing sessions in Barbados. Over the course of the year, tracks were laid down in batches at their studio, Polar, in Stockholm, slotted in around ongoing promotional commitments.

One of the earlier tracks to emerge would become a defining song of their career: *The Winner Takes It All*, Björn's bona fide 'divorce record'. (Benny's would follow the next year, on *The Visitors*.) Björn knocked out the words in an hour or so, aided by a bottle of whisky. While he has claimed it's not totally autobiographical (there were no winners, he says), there's no misunderstanding the sentiment. Such an audacious move – publicly laying bare their intimate lives in a pop song – invites comparisons to Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, released just three years earlier. But the key difference is that Fleetwood Mac's respective combatants got the chance to share their side of the story. ABBA's male songwriters were putting their own words into their counterparts' mouths, without the opportunity to return the favour. Consider the line: "Tell me does she kiss, the way I used to kiss you?" This uncomfortable asymmetry has been sent up in numerous comedy sketches, from Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan on *The Trip*, to a more recent Mitchell & Webb skit.

© Alamy

Frida and Agnetha's contrasting vocal ranges combined to create ABBA's signature sound

Nevertheless, with a surplus of raw emotion to pour into the material they were given, Agnetha and Frida are on their finest form vocally. The record follows the now-customary even split of lead vocals between them, whether solo or in unison. *Super Trouper* has each member playing to their strengths. While Björn would often 'do a Ringo' – allowing himself at least one token track to sing lead – he doesn't get a look in here.

SWEET HARMONY

Speaking with the Swedish newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter* (circa 2010), Björn discussed the distinct qualities of the ladies' natural vocal ranges that characterise ABBA's unique sonic identity. Frida is a deeper mezzo-soprano, while her partner Agnetha is a slightly higher soprano, meaning that Frida's voice has further to travel in pitch from its natural position to reach those higher notes, creating a distinct 'metallic' aesthetic. When singing together in unison, their voices combined with a mysterious alchemy to create that instantly recognisable sound that's not easily replicated.

It's that chiming perfection that some listeners find just a little too pure. A clean and crisp diction, so very prim and proper, that becomes a gripe for those who prefer the delivery to be a bit more rough and ready. In fairness, their theatre school annunciation stems at least in part from the non-native speakers' admirable attempts to get the phonetic sounds right. In many ways, it makes the feat all the more impressive, and another hallmark of the ABBA sound.

Likewise, Benny and Björn's production itself is very clean, bright, precise. Just so. You might

THE SONGS ▶▶

① SUPER TROUPER

An exquisite a capella intro reaffirms everything that's great about ABBA. All their signature moves come together in an infectious brew: a throbbing disco beat, bubbling synth arpeggiators, huge lead vocals by Frida and then two lead singers combining for catchy backing vocals. If there's a definition of ear candy, this might well be it. *Super Trouper* was a huge European No.1, although it did not reach the top spot in their home country. It was the group's ninth and final chart-topping single in the UK and sold more than 700,000 copies.

② THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL

Arguably ABBA's finest ever song, indeed, possibly one of the greatest pop songs ever committed to tape. The range of emotions it manages to pack into its five minutes is astonishing. It's the archetypal example of tears on the dancefloor: emotionally resonant yet still an absolute club banger. Agnetha's fragile lead vocal is underpinned by an effervescent bassline arrangement from Rutger Gunnarsson, that keeps the momentum pressing forward, while Benny punctuates it with those trademark octave stabs on the piano. Released as the first single in the summer, several months before the record itself arrived, it was an international No.1. Note: In the 90s, Steps shamelessly lifted the entire chord progression wholesale – along with the jilted lover theme – for their breakthrough song *One For Sorrow.*

③ ON AND ON AND ON

The sprightly pace continues as ABBA goes New Wave. *On And On And On* – complete with chugging guitars, synth flourishes and vocoder backing vocals – could pass for Martha And The Muffins or The Go-Go's. Its driving beat has a distinct freshness about it, with some stellar bass work from Gunnarsson propelling it along. The track offers a little bit of everything. While paying lip service to disco with its danceability, it's essentially a 12-bar blues at heart. The main refrain recalls The Beach Boys' *Do It Again* (indeed, Mike Love covered this song in 1981), while the way it ramps up vaguely pre-empts Pulp's *Common People.* However, the end result is pure ABBA.

④ ANDANTE, ANDANTE

After the cutting-edge sugar rush of *On And On And On*, the drop in tempo kills the momentum, as if the brakes have been slammed on a speeding motorbike. Opening with the piano, guitar lick and sweeping strings, this is now ABBA in their gushy, sentimental mode, with a syrupy, silky-smooth production fit for the classic Disney Princess movie montage scene. Frida sings the lead, while Agnetha supports with the harmonies. Most recently, Lily James took on the track as Young Donna in the film, *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again.*

⑤ ME AND I

Dreamy, woozy keyboards set the scene, before bright synth chord stabs kick in over a four-to-the-floor rhythm. It has that feel of a strutting peacock as the straight beat

> "WHEN SINGING TOGETHER IN UNISON, FRIDA AND AGNETHA'S VOICES COMBINED WITH A MYSTERIOUS ALCHEMY TO CREATE THAT INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE SOUND"

THE PLAYERS ▶▶

BENNY ANDERSSON

The co-songwriter and pianist, whose playing is the key to the ABBA sound. Formerly, he performed in the 60s Swedish group, The Hep Stars, before making it big with ABBA.

BJÖRN ULVAEUS

The band's co-songwriter, chief lyricist and guitarist, previously of the folk group The Hootenanny Singers, struck up a friendship with Benny when their paths crossed on the road in Sweden in 1966. Three years later, he met an 18-year-old Agnetha...

AGNETHA FÄLTSKOG

The blonde soprano, who had starred in *Jesus Christ Superstar* before joining ABBA, was going through a divorce from Björn while making *Super Trouper.* During this time, she also recorded a Christmas album with their daughter, Linda – which became a huge hit in Sweden.

ANNI-FRID LYNGSTAD

The Norwegian-born brunette mezzo-soprano and former solo star, then married to Benny, would soon be going through a separation as well.

MICHAEL B TRETOW

Another key figure, Tretow was the principal engineer. Upon his passing in May of this year, Benny commented: "You are the one who made [our music] timeless... the finest sound engineer the world has ever seen."

THE BAND

This oft-overlooked group included top-class musicians who played throughout ABBA's imperial phase, including Per Lindvall and Ola Brunkert (drums), Rutger Gunnarsson and Mike Watson (bass), and Janne Schaffer and Lasse Wellander (guitars).

contrasts with the brash, pompous synth brass (inspiration, perhaps, for *The Final Countdown*, released in 1986 by fellow Swedes Europe). The vibe also distinctly recalls the outro to ELO's *Mr Blue Sky* (released three years earlier). It opens out into another huge, infectious ABBA chorus.

⑥ HAPPY NEW YEAR

One of the casualties of Benny and Björn's aborted musical, *Happy New Year* is well at home on *Super Trouper* – a promising start to Side B and a highlight of the album. The song features those wonderful trademark chord transitions and a dynamic leaping melody, sung by Agnetha, enhanced by rhythmic chops on Benny's piano, while the backing vocals are characterised by swooping glissandos that Queen would be proud of. As is often the case with the key singles, they recorded a version in Spanish (*Felicidad*). In 1999, the English-language version of the song was re-released for the new millennium and has since become a regular feature on European charts at the end of each year.

⑦ OUR LAST SUMMER

Another superb cut that displays Benny and Björn's knack for crafting a fine tune. Lovely Beatlesque transitions pre-empt the satisfying pay-off chorus, with Frida singing the lead vocal. Lyrically, it's a wistful, nostalgic song, recalling the good old times as two lovers walking hand in hand. While Björn apparently took his inspiration from a brief summer fling as a teenager, it's hard not to view this within the context of the end of his marriage with Agnetha. The only jarring moment is the bombastic guitar solo, whose bluster detracts from the subtleties of the sentiment.

⑧ THE PIPER

ABBA's sheen often masks their complexity, and *The Piper* is the album's wildcard. Slinky guitars in the intro make way for a military march, accompanied by a medieval-sounding recorder, in reference to the Pied Piper of Hamelin. The song takes additional inspiration from Stephen King's *The Stand*, and the idea of a fascist character who casts a spell over an unsuspecting public. *The Piper* presents a confounding brew of styles and instrumentation, being both experimental yet accessible. It's ABBA at their most eccentric. Just when you think you've sussed it out, they throw in something weird to knock you off kilter.

⑨ LAY ALL YOUR LOVE ON ME

Another of those contemporary classics that has become so familiar, it's easy to forget quite how good it really is. That memorable synth riff builds up with another four-to-the-floor beat, the perfect setting for Agnetha's empowering lead. Never intended as a 7", it was finally released a full year after the record's first single, as a 12". With ABBA mania still in full swing, it proved a hit in the clubs and gave them a No.1 on the US Dance charts. Its status has continued to grow over time. It was later selected as the lead track of Erasure's techno-fuelled *ABBA-esque* tribute EP, which helped to revitalise ABBA's career, with a further boost following the release of the 2008 rom-com *Mamma Mia!*

⑩ THE WAY OLD FRIENDS DO

A live cut culled from their November 1979 residency at Wembley Arena. Aesthetically, it's an odd choice to end a studio album with a live recording, making it feel more like a bonus track. It's fine on its own merits. However, following the epic club floorfiller that is *Lay All Your Love On Me*, the more orchestral, symphonic sound (complete with the rumbling roll of timpani) slightly kills the vibe. Although an original ABBA composition, it has the feel of a traditional folk song or hymn – a rousing anthem you might hear played at a national historic occasion. Lyrically, though, there is some continuity with the album's themes, and it closes the record on a positive message of sticking together through adversity.

⑪ ELAINE – B-SIDE / REISSUE BONUS TRACK

Originally released as the B-side for *The Winner Takes It All*, *Elaine* was later added to the album on subsequent CD reissues. It's another bright, New Wave number, with catchy synth electronics. Given the strength of competing material, you can see why it was initially omitted, but even ABBA B-sides and outtakes are often a cut above the rest. Based purely on its production aesthetic, its inclusion in place of *The Way Old Friends Do* would perhaps have been more complementary to the LP as a whole.

⑫ PUT ON YOUR WHITE SOMBRERO – REISSUE BONUS TRACK

Though considered for the album, this song was pulled at the last minute for the title track – and that's just as well. The production and arrangement are, as might be expected, truly exquisite in every detail. The song itself is a bit twee. It features a swung rhythm, and the woozy synths they seemed to be so keen on during this era. Frida sings, and it showcases her impressive range. It was later used as the basis for *Cassandra* (another B-side).

have to lie down afterwards to recover from the sugar rush. With disco falling out of favour, they moved away from the dance-oriented *Voulez-Vous* back to a more straight-up pop sound, though still with plenty of dancefloor bangers. That said, there are curveballs. In both lyrics and arrangements, ABBA have always been very visual, richly evoking a scene or narrative. Benny and Björn's musical theatre ambitions are notably evident on tracks like *The Piper*, which explores wider instrumentation, tempo changes and strong visual imagery. It's the most experimental song on the record; the opposite of playing it safe.

When it comes to instrumentation, not much credit ever goes to ABBA's backing players. On *Super Trouper*, they called upon the usual suspects – unsung heroes, so integral to the sound, who rarely get a tip of the hat.

Regulars, Lasse Wellander on guitar, Rutger Gunnarsson on bass and string arrangements, and Ola Brunkert on drums form the bedrock of the record. Gunnarsson's basslines, in particular, do so much of the heavy lifting, providing an optimistic counterpoint to the mournful lyrics. Other players, including bassist Mike Watson (who is dressed as Napoleon with his

Shining like the sun: ABBA pictured at the album cover's photoshoot

© Alamy

Björn and Benny leave their Drury Lane hotel in London before seeing Pink Floyd perform at Earls Court on 8 August 1980

> "ALL HUMANS EXPOSED TO THEIR MUSIC WILL REACH THE SAME ULTIMATE CONCLUSION: ABBA ARE THE BENCHMARK AGAINST WHICH ALL OTHER POP IS MEASURED"

back turned on the *Waterloo* LP cover), and guitarist Janne Schaffer, and drummer Per Lindvall, contributed key parts.

PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

As anyone who hasn't been living in a cave will know, ABBA's currency is today higher than ever. But it's easy to forget there was a time when this wasn't so.

Even at ABBA's height, there were the vocal dissenters. And following their dissolution, the group remained firmly out of vogue for many years. Then the group's gradual reappraisal was initially mired by that classic back-handed compliment: the guilty pleasure. Something that you might find yourself singing along to, though you would never openly acknowledge it.

For so long, to so many, ABBA's perennially chirpy pop was a byword for cheese; only to be enjoyed ironically, with a knowing wink. The earnestness of the singers, the apparent smugness of the two men stood behind them. But, eventually, however hard they resist, all humans exposed to their music – by means of their head or their feet – will reach the same ultimate conclusion: ABBA are the benchmark against which all other pop is measured.

In the post-Beatles landscape of melodic commercial chart pop, no one does it better. Essentially, each record from 1976's *Arrival* up to *Super Trouper* plays out like a self-contained greatest hits collection, with this record serving as the apex of that curve. By this stage in their trajectory, through sheer commitment to their craft, incremental honing of their skills, and authenticity of emotion, they had hit an artistic peak.

For the most part, the songwriting, delivery and production are impeccable. ABBA's gift (so often misconstrued as a handicap) is simply making it all look so effortless.

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL

As with most of ABBA's promo videos, *The Winner Takes It All* was directed by Lasse Hallström, who would go on to receive an Oscar nod, and helm Hollywood movies like *Chocolat* and *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* It's a textbook ABBA video with the Jonathan Demme-style tightly-cropped close-ups, blending between their faces in soft focus. Filmed just 10 days after Björn and Agnetha's divorce was finalised on the island of Marstrand, it's a brave video where Agnetha is often presented in desperate solitude.

SUPER TROUPER

Another Hallström video, *Super Trouper* follows the theme of its lyrics, using a spotlight to highlight the band and recreate the scene from the LP cover. However, in a flagrant example of false advertising, the brand of spotlight used in the promo is not actually a Super Trouper. A playful vibe runs throughout the video, as acrobats, jugglers and other circus acts appear on stage, giving the performance a carnival-like energy – but we all know the jovial scenes and smiles merely serve to mask the behind-the-scenes heartache.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Björn and Agnetha are looking glum in the living room of a grand apartment, the morning after the night before. Taking a very literal interpretation of the song's lyrics, with decorations strewn all over the place from the previous evening's party ("The dreams we had before/ Are all dead, nothing more/ Than confetti on the floor"). These intimate shots are contrasted with the big party scenes, taken from the same session as the shoot for the *Super Trouper* promo.

ON AND ON AND ON

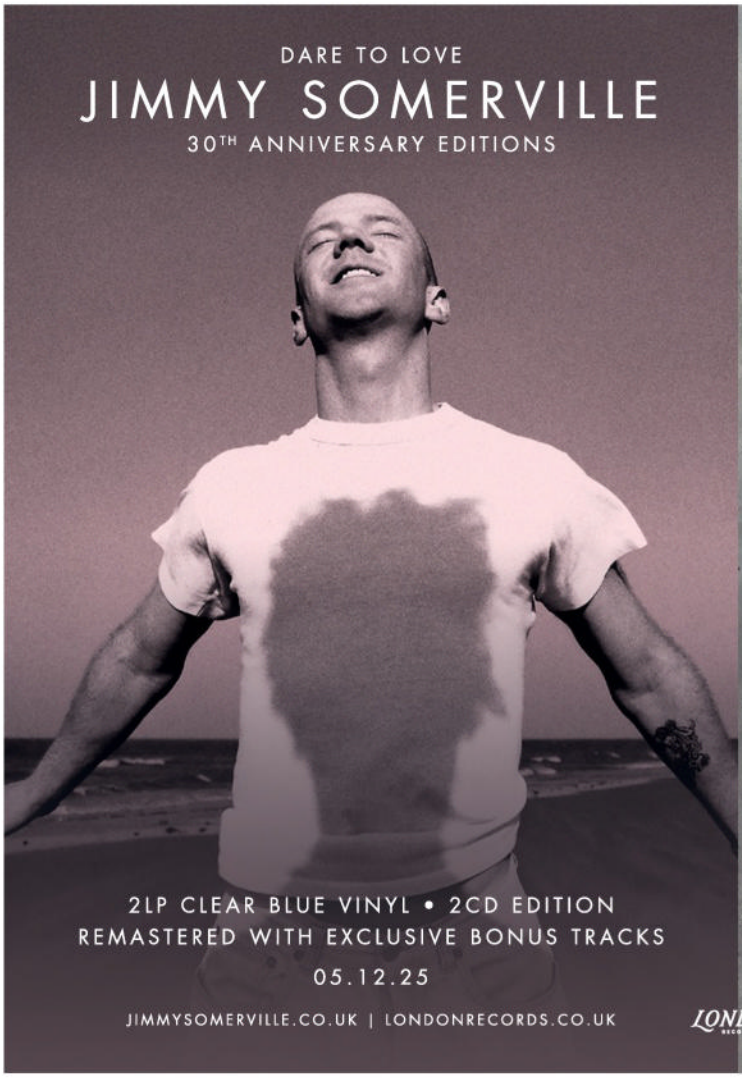
Promotional schedules presumably prevented the band filming a standard promo, and so an animated slide show video was produced from concert photographs, taken from their Las Vegas show during their recent US tour. A change stylistically from their usual videos, it nonetheless conveys the scale of ABBA-mania. However, what the promo lacks in visuals it makes up for in music, then being the only release to include the full extended version of the song (with an additional verse).

Super Trouper represents a maturing of their sound, a grown-up commentary on the realities of life. For a wholesome, top-tier pop act, there's a phenomenal degree of human fragility on display. Yet, despite the sobering themes, it remains bags of fun. Far from being bogged down by the subject material, the mood remains surprisingly upbeat.

Musically, it shows the group continuing to innovate. It came at a time when Blondie were riding a wave of success, and The Pretenders had arrived on a maelstrom of swaggering bravado, both acts symbolising a new, streetwise type of cool, in many ways the antithesis of ABBA.

But ABBA had come through and survived all the fads – sometimes making gentle nods to them, without fundamentally compromising their own identity. Even punk couldn't tear them down. One Joe Strummer was in the audience for their 1979 Wembley shows, while Sex Pistols' Glen Matlock even admitted to lifting the bassline of *SOS* for *Pretty Vacant*.

Really, what's left to say about ABBA, other than that you can't fight the tide? In the end, they'll win you over by sheer force. ■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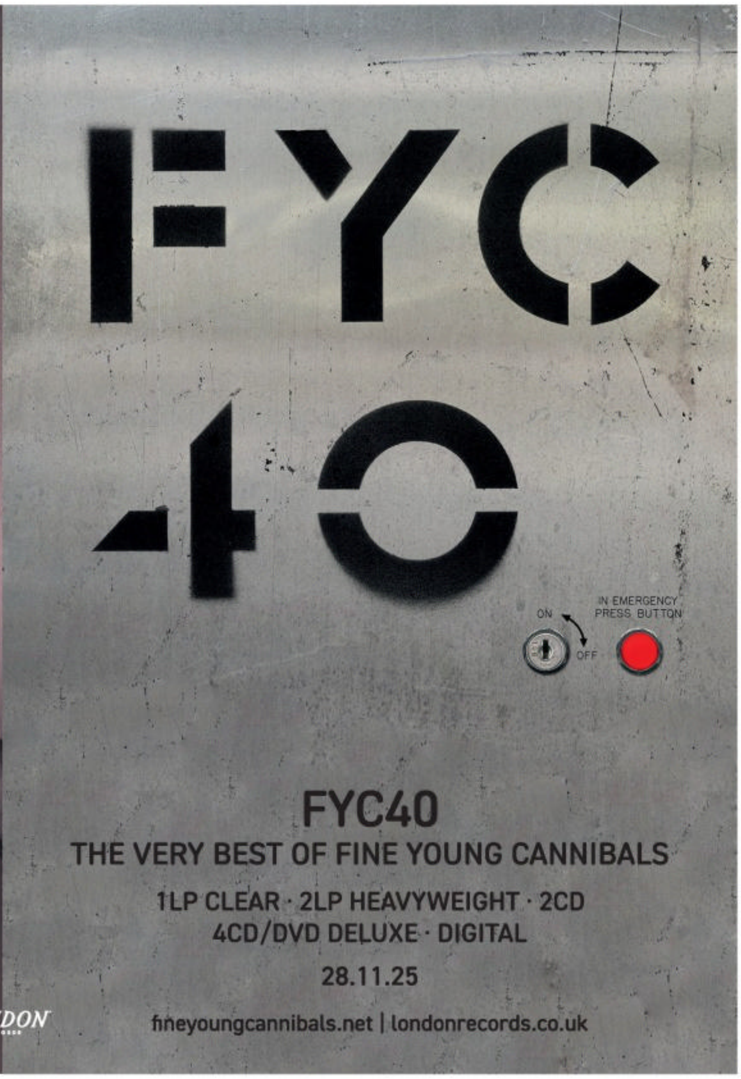

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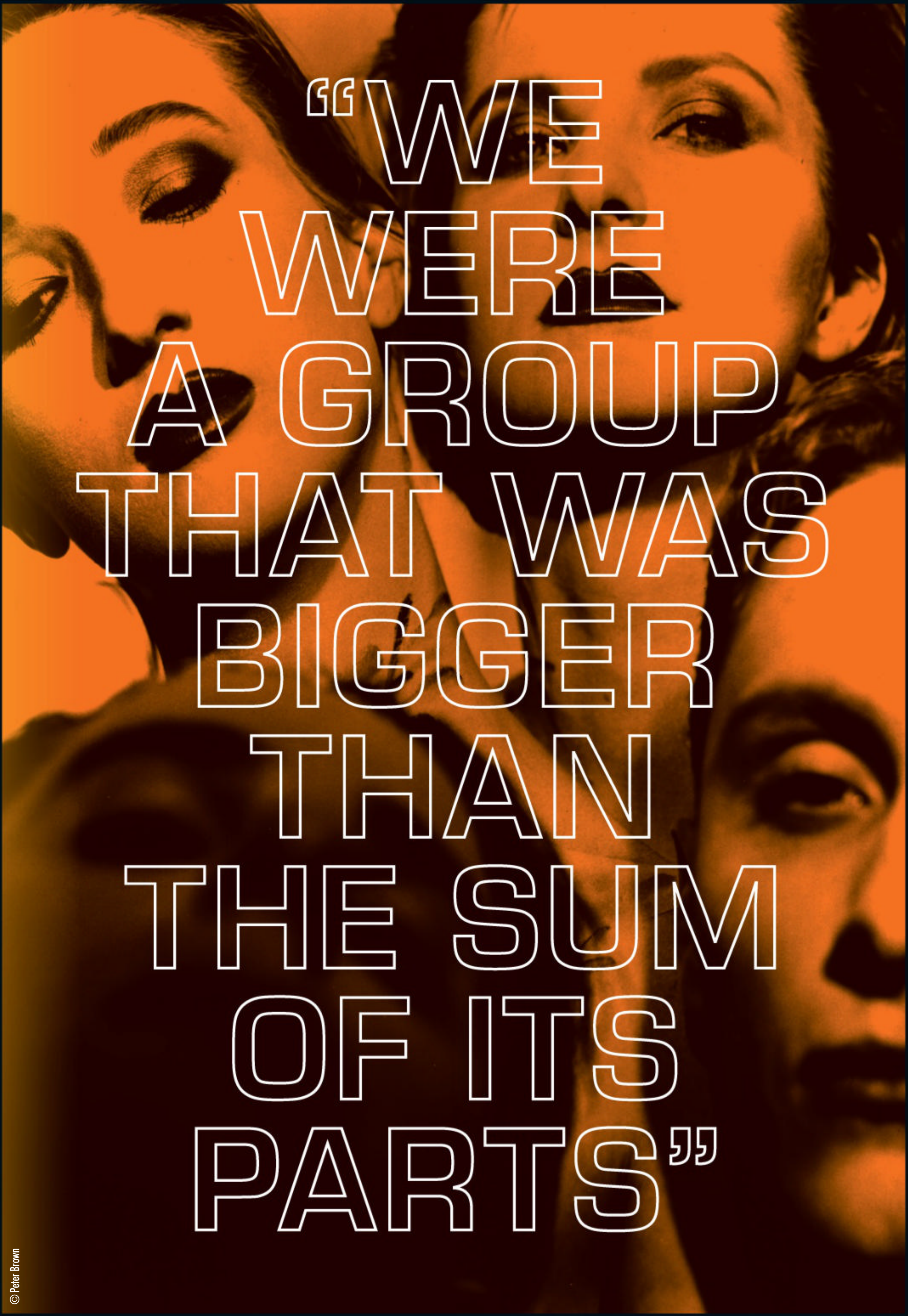

“WE WERE A GROUP THAT WAS BIGGER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS”

© Peter Brown

ONE OF THE MOST GLORIOUSLY MULTI-LAYERED POP ALBUMS EVER MADE, PROPAGANDA'S *A SECRET WISH* IS THE CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT OF A BAND WHO NEVER QUITE GOT IT TOGETHER AFTERWARDS, WITH THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AS COMPLEX AS THEIR MUSIC. AS A NEW BOXSET HONOURS ITS MAJESTY, ALL FOUR MEMBERS CELEBRATE THEIR ACHIEVEMENT – AND VOW TO BE FRIENDLY WHEN DISCUSSING THEIR MASTERPIECE.

JOHN EARLS

It's been a long time, and we had a great time together. I prefer to remember the positive things than anything I didn't like. If I met them, I'd be happy to see them, to share the memories." So says Michael Mertens, Propaganda's main music writer, on the delicate relationships between the band's two camps.

Mertens and lyricist Ralf Dörper kept the Propaganda name, reviving it for last year's self-titled album, the first as Propaganda since 1990's *1234*.

Meanwhile, singers Claudia Brücken and Susanne Freytag, alongside original Propaganda producer Stephen Lipson, returned from the wilderness just before their male colleagues as xPropaganda on 2022's *The Heart Is Strange*.

Forty years after *A Secret Wish*, Propaganda's stunning sole album with the (mostly) original line-up, there have been several barbs at each other (sometimes via *Classic Pop*.) Marking the new luxurious boxset of their triumph together, however, we're pleased to report a genuine public wish to understand each other. "We were a group that was bigger than the sum of its parts," according to Susanne, joining Claudia via Zoom. "Our chemistry together, and our arrival at ZTT where we worked with such an incredible team of people, gave us an amazing opportunity."

"I'm pleased we have such a good boxset," notes Ralf, by phone shortly after he was due to have joined Michael on a separate video call. (Ralf's mobile had died, to which Michael smilingly notes: "This inefficiency will not go unremarked.") The complete ZTT works of Propaganda extends to six CDs, with Ralf stating: "I wonder how Universal managed to find all these tracks. It's a special treatment."

PROJECT PLANS

Ralf was the most experienced musician in Propaganda, having played keyboards for industrial pioneers Die Krupps in Düsseldorf. Shortly after leaving them in 1982, he met artist Andreas Thein at a club in Cologne. "From the beginning, Andreas and I viewed Propaganda as a project," recalls Ralf. "I knew Susanne and we featured her vocals on our first demo, but our next song could have been an instrumental. Propaganda was something Andreas and I thought of as potentially 12" after 12". I'd been in a band structure with Die Krupps, and thought band structures are complicated." A pause. "I still think that." Of his friend's role in Propaganda, Ralf says: "Andreas was enthusiastic, and an instigator. His direct involvement in the music wasn't so high."

Then a percussionist for the Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra, Michael joined when he met Ralf after selling him a drum machine. "Ralf still has my old drum box," laughs Michael. "When he came by to collect it, he saw my room full of instruments. I had an Oberheim synthesizer, which blew his mind. That's when Ralf told me about his Propaganda project."

The use of the word "project", rather than "band", to describe Propaganda surprises Claudia and Susanne. In a 1985 *Record Mirror* interview, Ralf was openly stating it unlikely that they'd be a long-term proposition.

Claudia Brücken was the last to join Propaganda and relocated to London when they signed with ZTT

The 6CD boxset, *A Secret Sense Of Rhythm, A Secret Sense Of Sin*, is the definitive overview of Propaganda's time on ZTT

PROPAGANDA

"I thought we were all in a band," says Claudia. "For me, it felt very much like a band. It's not something I saw as a project." "Me too," nods Susanne. "It was a band for me, but everyone has different visions. Maybe Ralf thought we were just a project. I don't think we had a vision for the future beyond the moment we were living in."

The last to join, Claudia had sung with Susanne in party-funk band The Topolinos. By then, journalist Chris Bohn had given his friend Paul Morley Propaganda's first demo. Excited at the German glamour of it all, and recognising *Dr Mabuse* as a potential arthouse banger, Morley told Trevor Horn that Propaganda had to be the first signing for their new ZTT label. "We had to wait until ZTT was officially in existence to get the paperwork done on our deal," says Ralf. "We got to see it all come together there, down to the design company having meetings about the colour of Sarm West studio and the walls then getting painted."

As a five-piece, Propaganda themselves were still figuring themselves out, too. "I was still in the orchestra and totally out of pop music," explains Michael. "I'd only hear pop at parties. I knew a lot about music, but not about songwriting. After I first met Ralf, he brought me some records to show the general idea of where Propaganda's music would be located: early Human League, *Let Me Go* by Heaven 17.

"Not knowing a lot about songwriting is something reflected in *A Secret Wish*. Songs like *Dream Within A Dream* or *p:Machinery*: that's not classic songwriting. There's no chords, it's just manic rhythm."

Any "Who should sing what?" debate was easy to settle for Susanne and Claudia. "Claudia was clearly the singer," insists Susanne. "Some songs work with my speaking voice, turning them into a dialogue."

Claudia continues: "It's good to have a mix. We bounce off each other, sometimes we merge together.

Propaganda's Michael Mertens, Susanne Freytag, Ralf Dörper and Claudia Brücken scored two UK Top 30 hit singles with *Dr Mabuse* and *Duel*

© Peter Brown

“I ONLY REALISED LATER HOW GOOD TREVOR HORN IS AT MAKING YOU FEEL SPECIAL. IN THE STUDIO WITH HIM, IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU. I'VE NEVER MET ANYONE WHO'S SO GOOD AT THAT.”

MICHAEL MERTENS

Still now, we call ourselves Voice 1 and Voice 2.”

Claudia is also quick to convey praise for Stephen Lipson's role in helping both vocalists with their performances, saying: “Stephen knows when and how to introduce a voice into a song. He has such a clear vision for vocals, like on *Frozen Faces*. It was his idea to have us all talk at the same time.”

REMIX/REMODEL

The new boxset is largely based around the many remixes which emerged from *A Secret Wish*. That started straight away, with several extended visions of *Dr Mabuse* remaining sacred texts in how to overhaul a 12”. There are minor discrepancies in the band's views on the value of remixes: Claudia says of the boxset that she appreciates fans want all the mixes, but admits: “It's all about *A Secret Wish* as an album. That's our art, the way we intended it to be listened to. Everything else isn't what I'd necessarily listen to.” Susanne enjoyed “all those different paths” the mixes offered, while Ralf is the biggest adherent to Propaganda's role in mix culture. He points out: “Being signed to ZTT, remixes were always going to have an importance.

“*Dr Mabuse* is a multi-dimensional song, the same as the Fritz Lang film that it's named after. It certainly needed something longer than three minutes.

“Trevor Horn said he wanted to develop its story over the mixes, as it gave him so many ideas.”

All the band rhapsodise Horn's influence, with Michael emphasising: “I only realised later how good Trevor is at making you feel special. In the studio with Trevor, it's all about you. I've never met anyone since who's so good at that. We were all total beginners, lifted onto a plateau we'd never have reached otherwise without Trevor and his team.”

© Thomas Ecke

Ralf Dörper and Michael Mertens revived the band's name for last year's self-titled album

Only Ralf had been in a studio before, with Susanne feeling their newcomers' enthusiasm added to Propaganda's music. “There was such a sense of excitement from the studio demos,” she enthuses. “People would say ‘What's *that*?’ when they heard them. Our songs were taken somewhere else by Trevor, Stephen and their team.”

Other top future producers helped out, too, as Ralf details: “J. J. Jeczalik would do Fairlight parts, Andy Richards was responsible for the Roland, Stephen would supervise it. It felt like working in a music factory, certain people having expertise for certain aspects of a song.”

Once *Dr Mabuse* was released, Propaganda's first fissure emerged... Another single on ZTT did pretty well: *Relax*. Trevor Horn was suddenly too preoccupied trying to assemble a second Frankie Goes To Hollywood single to focus on Propaganda.

Most of the band understood ZTT's issues – Ralf: “ZTT was like a start-up, with a brilliant idea but not enough manpower” – however not Andreas Thein. The tale of Andreas' departure before second single *Duel* has been a thorny topic for 40 years.

Today, all four Propagandas agree Andreas – who died from cancer in 2013 – was a troubled visionary. Michael: “Andreas didn't take the delay after *Relax* very well. He thought: ‘Why do we have to wait?’ He got on everyone's nerves, phoning ZTT up every day from Cologne, asking: ‘When do we start?’” Susanne: “Andreas was a complicated genius.

PROPAGANDA
A SECRET WISH

Produced by Stephen Lipson, *A Secret Wish* was released by ZTT Records in 1985

Many creative people can be difficult to work with. Unfortunately, he was one of them." Ralf: "Andreas being forced out was helpful for getting the record done, and helpful for Andreas, as people got involved with him as he'd been an international pop star. So it was a good exit." Claudia: "I've been made out to be the black sheep in Andreas' exit, with stories that we had a fight. That never happened. It was a joint all-round decision."

EARLY DEPARTURE

Indeed it was. Eventually, a group meeting was called in the attic at Sarm, while Andreas was still in Cologne. Michael warned his bandmate it was happening, telling him to phone back later. "All four of us said it was best if he left," says Michael. "Once that decision was made, I asked: 'OK, so who is going to tell him?' And everyone said: 'I've got something I have to do.' None of them stood by their decision. I was the guy who delivered the bad news, which made Andreas think I was the one responsible."

As Claudia says, fan lore generally has it that she forced Andreas out. Told of Michael detailing the unanimous band meeting, she's delighted: it's touching to see the resultant smile. Claudia says: "I'm very pleased Michael said that. That is very healing."

With Horn still too busy, Lipson took over production. Ultimately, it wasn't a huge change: Lipson had already engineered *Dr Mabuse*, while Horn – always in the building anyway, as ZTT was based at Sarm – would give his verdict on recordings and make occasional suggestions.

Although it took a year for *A Secret Wish* to arrive, Susanne points out: "It was our first album. We had nothing to compare it to, so it didn't feel a long time." Claudia: "We thought: 'This is the creative process, it takes what it takes.' And that's true. Some albums take two weeks, some two years."

Not all of it was a marathon – Michael recalls *The Chase* arriving quickly, having been informed they needed another song to complete the album – while Claudia delighted in guests including David Sylvian and Stewart Copeland popping by to contribute: "John McGeoch's guitar on *p:Machinery* was an outburst of energy that blew my mind."

"Some songs work with my speaking voice, turning them into a dialogue" – Susanne Freytag

The band recognise the classic they all made together, though Ralf has a mild frustration that it includes a cover of Josef K's *Sorry For Laughing*, grumbling: "There are so many classic records where you can't imagine they'd ever have a cover version on them. I wish we'd developed our early song *Doppelgänger* instead. Doing a cover of a Scottish band who were hip in the 80s? That was a fad. But there are a few 80s records I can still listen to, and it's great other people have that experience with *A Secret Wish*."

There are other frustrations for Ralf in Paul Morley's role. He praises the arch-marketeer for keeping the band buoyant during the months between *Dr Mabuse* and Propaganda's second single *Duel*, but remains upset over Morley's plans to use a J.G. Ballard quote referencing Baader-Meinhof on *p:Machinery's* German artwork. "That was stupid," he fumes. "Morley had been so successful with *Relax*, causing a sex scandal in England, that he wanted to get a political scandal going with us in Germany. It was so crass."

Propaganda tried learning English from their Scouse labelmates, Frankie Goes To Hollywood

FRANKIE SAY... WHAT?

While the recording of *Welcome To The Pleasuredome* took precedence over *A Secret Wish*, there was no bad blood between Propaganda and Frankie Goes To Hollywood. "We'd all meet in the kitchen at Sarm," laughs Susanne Freytag. "We were learning English by conversing with bands like Frankie."

"We'd see Frankie at The Columbia, this rock and roll hotel near Hyde Park," remembers Michael Mertens. "Mark O'Toole told me: 'I've got a cassette, it's the bassline for our new single.' He gave me a Walkman and played an early version of *Two Tribes*. It blew me away, it was fantastic."

Ralf Dörper liked Frankie, too, but admits: "I had one problem with them: I couldn't understand The Lads. Holly and Paul were easier to understand, but the dialect of Ped, Mark and Nasher took weeks to follow. That was difficult, but we were close. Don't forget, we had the same bad record contracts, so there was plenty we could joke about."

George Michael was another visitor to Sarm. When Propaganda were preparing a backing track to use on *The Tube*, all three studios at Sarm were in use. Ralf laughs: "Andreas and I set up our sequencer and a Moog in the storage room, which wasn't soundproofed. We were blasting away when Wham!'s engineer suddenly came in with a note saying: 'Best wishes from George Michael. Please stop the noise.'"

Freytag and Brücken returned as xPropaganda for 2022's *The Heart Is Strange*

© Jimmy King

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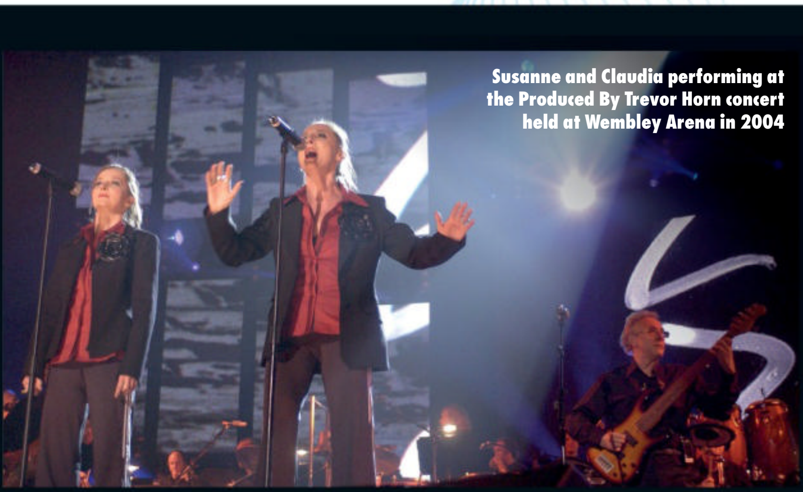

Susanne and Claudia performing at the Produced By Trevor Horn concert held at Wembley Arena in 2004

WEMBLEY WAY

Ralf Dörper didn't play live with Propaganda. Inspired by Heaven 17, he didn't think it was right for groups to use a backing track on stage, so he stayed in Düsseldorf while his bandmates toured *A Secret Wish* in Europe.

TV performances apart, it meant the only time the Claudia/Susanne/Ralf/Michael line-up performed live together was a reunion for The Prince's Trust at Wembley Arena in 2004, when nearly all of Trevor Horn's production clients appeared.

"That was so exciting," beams Susanne Freytag today. "There were a lot of talks between us beforehand, and it was complicated, but it worked out really well."

"It was very nice," according to Michael Mertens. "Jill Sinclair wasn't very warm to us, but that was understandable. And it was wonderful seeing so many great artists, talking to people like Neil Tennant and Grace Jones."

"Seeing our name so huge at Wembley was wonderful," says Ralf Dörper. "It was how our complicated music should be brought to the stage: a big band, an orchestra, no playback."

Claudia Brücken agrees the orchestra was magical, saying: "I remember it not so much as a performance from the four of us, but as part of this huge production. I wasn't even thinking about performing with Ralf and Michael again, but the enormity of that orchestra. Singing with them, I thought: 'Wow! When am I going to do *this* again?'"

By then, Morley was married to Claudia. "Claudia couldn't accept any criticism of her husband," insists Ralf. "I understand that. It was a Catch-22."

Michael adds: "We never stood a chance, as we never had chance to grow together as a band."

Claudia is used to these criticisms. She had heard them from Susanne, too, before their xPropaganda reunion.

"Paul was an artist, too," she states. "I always knew how much he loved the band, how dedicated he was to us, and the other bands on ZTT. The business side, the other stuff? He was learning on the job."

She stares into her laptop screen at Susanne on the Zoom. "I knew Paul's commitment – but I know you didn't."

Susanne nods, and considers: "No, we didn't, and of course that was a division. Now, I see it differently.

"I can see different paths that different people want to envision. There was a lack of insight at the time."

Claudia reasons: "Paul so often gets harsh criticism, and I feel bad for him. It didn't help that the rest of the band were in Düsseldorf, while I was in London. That led to everyone feeling I'd leave to go solo. It's OK that you felt that, but that was a threat that wasn't there." Susanne: "You're right, and we never talked about it until years later."

STRANGE MAGIC

It's fair to say ZTT's record contract didn't help either. Susanne regrets that, when business overseer Jill Sinclair offered to renegotiate Propaganda's deal, their lawyer advised them to reject her. Claudia did then go solo and Susanne left, too.

Despite the business side, Propaganda agree on the strange magic ZTT fostered as artists. "I know it sounds like there was a lot of negativity in Propaganda, but we had the best time at ZTT," says Ralf.

Michael adds, "We did a lot of puff in those days and had a lot of laughs together. The business side got in the way, but making the album is a great memory."

Claudia also confirms just how enjoyable the creative process was: "I wanted to continue working with Trevor and Stephen, as I thought it was so special."

Of course, *A Secret Wish* continues to resonate. Its legacy was recently brought home to Susanne, when xPropaganda played a festival in Chemnitz in the former East Germany in September. She says: "In East Germany in the 80s, young people were so pissed off they couldn't see their favourite bands.

"Youth demonstrations were about youth culture, and not being able to see us was a tiny part of that. *Dr Mabuse* posters were apparently pretty popular. The Scorpions would probably say a similar thing!" ■

● Propaganda's boxset *A Secret Sense Of Rhythm: A Secret Sense Of Sin* is released by UMR on 14 November and reviewed on page 89

PROPAGANDA

a secret sense of rhythm :
a secret sense of sin
(the complete ZTT Propaganda)

For the first time, this **deluxe collector's edition box set**, curated by ZTT archivist Ian Peel, presents a definitive archive of Propaganda's groundbreaking work, **including hit singles 'Dr Mabuse' and 'Duel'**.

6-CD boxset features **rare mixes** and **3 unreleased tracks,** and the 1LP features a **new Atmos mix** by David Kosten.

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UNIVERSAL MUSIC
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THE PRETENDERS

CHRISSIE HYNDE HAS ANCHORED THE BAND THROUGH VARIOUS SHIFTING LINE-UP CHANGES AND NEW ERAS – BLENDING RAW ENERGY, SHARP SONGWRITING AND UNDENIABLE ATTITUDE ACROSS DECADES

MARK LINDORES

PRETENDERS

THE SASSY STRUT OF *BRASS IN POCKET* MARCHED TO THE TOP OF THE CHARTS, WITH THE ALBUM HOT ON ITS HEELS

It is no surprise that the hit-packed, self-titled debut from The Pretenders was wrapped in an almost universal blanket of praise upon its release at the beginning of 1980, hailing them as rock's brightest hope for the forthcoming decade.

A monolithic masterclass in tight musicianship, clever lyrics and distinctive vocals, it was thrust upon a scene which had had its standards lowered immeasurably by the vital but not exactly technically proficient punk scene.

Fronted by the formidable floppy-fringed, kohl-eyed colossus that is Chrissie Hynde, the four-piece traded in grit not glamour, with the sharp edges of its rock-obsessed leader smoothed by the more melody-driven guitarist James Honeyman-Scott, drummer Martin Chambers and bassist Pete Farndon. While the only pop Chrissie had previously expressed an interest in was Iggy, her new bandmates opened her eyes to the musical merits of ABBA and The Beach Boys to forge their own amalgamation of catchy hooks and melodies fuelled by raw power.

A regular on the UK music scene since she touched down in Britain in 1973, the Ohio-born Anglophile Hynde had circled the peripheries of punk. She wrote for *NME* and worked at Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's SEX shop, and was close to The Clash, Sex Pistols and Motörhead before starting her own band.

She recruited the Hereford-born trio of Martin, James and Pete and signed with Dave Hill's label, Real Records in 1978.

With only a handful of shows under their collective studded belts, the group had no following to speak of and rather than rush the album, they instead spent close to two years massaging Chrissie's demos into Pretenders songs with producer Chris Thomas.

Original producer Nick Lowe saw no future for the band after recording a cover of The Kinks' *Stop Your Sobbing* and exited sessions, making way for Thomas to take over.

Reckless and relentless, the punchy aggression of Side One illustrates Hynde's hard-knock life back in Akron, Ohio, detailing unsavoury encounters with deadbeats and biker gangs (particularly the brutal *Tattooed Love Boys*), while Side Two reveals a softer, more diverse face, kicking off with the melodic melancholia of *Kid* (about a boy who finds out his mother is a sex worker), a dip into dub reggae on *Private Life* (covered by Grace Jones the same year), and the sassy strut of breakthrough hit single *Brass In Pocket*, which marched to the top of the charts with the album hot on its heels.

PRETENDERS

Released 1980
Label Real Records/Sire
Chart Positions
UK No.1 US No.9

Although not as revered as its predecessor, the band's second album bears a lot of the hallmarks of what made the debut so great, though time constraints due to the quartet's hectic touring schedule and label pressure to strike while the iron was hot is obvious (and strongly alluded to in the lyrics of *Day After Day* and *Pack It Up* respectively), leading to slightly diminished returns.

Taken on its own merits, *Pretenders II* is a very good album littered with a few great songs. The trademark riffs and licks, unusual structures and unexpected phrasing are present throughout and it is on the whole a more polished set.

Its major flaw, though, is that you can occasionally recognise something they'd already done better on the previous record. *Bad Boys Get Spanked* for example, is an inferior rocker in the vein of *Tattooed Love Boys* (despite its added whip cracks) while the reggae-tinged flex of *Waste Not Want Not* pales in comparison to *Private Life*.

Two of the strongest tracks had already been released as singles earlier in 1981 (included as part of the *Extended Play EP* in the United States) so the fact that nothing else scaled those heights proved disappointing. However, with *Talk Of The Town* – one of their poppier moments and punchy rocker *Message Of Love* – they showcased the two different sides of the band perfectly and added to their tally of Top 20 hits.

Elsewhere, the smoky lullaby *I Go To Sleep* (another song from the pen of Ray Davies) is a superb pastiche of 60s melodrama, *Birds Of Paradise* and *Day After Day* showcase Chrissie's pop chops and the caustic *Pack It Up* takes aim at record companies as she sneers and snarls, berating the men in suits for their inadequacies.

Chugging opener *The Adultress* captures Chrissie at her sultry best (she later joked that it became a prophetic manifestation of her relationship with Ray Davies) and closer *Louie Louie* incorporates Stax soul and ska to serve as a rousing finale of a versatile collection once again produced by Chris Thomas.

The album reached No.7 in the UK and No.10 in the US upon release in August 1981.

Unfortunately, *Pretenders II* serves as a swansong to the dynamic original four-piece line-up. Having ignored repeated warnings that his performances were suffering as a result of his escalating drug use, Pete Farndon was fired from the band on 14 June 1982. Two days later, they were hit by the shocking news that James Honeyman-Scott had died after suffering heart failure due to excessive cocaine use. Any hopes harboured by fans that Farndon would return to the fold were dashed the following April when he was found dead in the bath after overdosing on heroin.

Following the dual tragedies, Chrissie and Martin later explained that, although crushing, the deaths weren't complete surprises given the extent of drug abuse within the group at the time.

Following a long period of examining their own behaviour, processing their guilt over whether they could have done anything to avoid the deaths, they gathered themselves and decided to continue the group, putting the wheels in motion to embark on a new era.

> TAKEN ON ITS OWN MERITS, *PRETENDERS II* IS A VERY GOOD ALBUM LITTERED WITH A FEW GREAT SONGS

PRETENDERS II
Released 1981
Label Real Records/Sire
Chart positions
UK No.7 US No.10

THE PRETENDERS
LEARNING TO CRAWL

Picking up the pieces following the losses of James and Pete, Chrissie and Martin were tasked with rebuilding their band, a process Hynde later revealed they found terribly difficult as they weren't just replacing their bassist and guitarist, they were essentially replacing their best friends.

Guitarist Billy Bremner, bass players Tony Butler and Andrew Bodnar and pianist Paul Carrack filled the void on the early sessions of the album (which resulted in *Back On The Chain Gang*, *My City Was Gone* and *Thin Line Between Love And Hate*) before Robbie McIntosh on lead guitar and Malcolm Foster on bass were enlisted as official band members.

Despite being born out of tragedy, *Learning To Crawl* is a fantastic album, possibly their best to date, depending on whether you prefer your Pretenders punky or poppy.

A much more accessible body of work, it largely tones down the trademark sneering and sarcasm, with Hynde literally fighting to save her band and delivering some of her best songwriting and vocals. Apparently named to reflect the stage of physical development Chrissie's daughter Natalie had reached at the time of release, it's impossible to ignore how *Learning To Crawl* could also be applied to the band once again finding its feet.

Any doubts over the ability of the group to bounce back are eradicated in the first minute of rollicking opener *Middle Of The Road*, which is a more refined take on the swagger of earlier work – likewise on *Time The Avenger*.

Back On The Chain Gang, although penned prior to James' death took on a poignant new meaning in its aftermath and was dedicated to him. *Show Me* is one of the album's more melodic moments in the same lane as *Talk Of The Town*.

Watching The Clothes and *Thumbelina* – a rockabilly-inspired track about a woman on the run with her child – both possess a strong narrative as does the bluesy groove of *My City Was Gone*, a lament to Hynde's hometown of Akron.

The band's haunting take on The Persuaders' *Thin Line Between Love And Hate* improves on the 1971 original. The back and forth of *I Hurt You*'s multi-tracked vocals create a tension and tangled dialogue, which plays out over a reggae-inspired bassline. The sense of loss is best executed on *2000 Miles* which has gone on to become a perennial Christmas staple.

Once again Chris Thomas' production excels, matching the maturity of the lyrics with a more refined sound but always retaining an earthy authenticity.

The album missed the UK Top 10 when it was released in January 1984, stalling at No.11. It fared even better in the US, reaching No.5 – their highest charting long-player.

Capitalising on that success – and still settling into their roles within the new line-up, the band spent much of the next year on the road playing to their largest crowds to that point before winding it up by performing at Live Aid in Philadelphia.

Having almost lost everything, their perseverance resulted in some of their strongest work to date – *Learning To Crawl* is a triumph of art over adversity.

> HAVING ALMOST LOST EVERYTHING, THEIR PERSEVERANCE RESULTED IN SOME OF THEIR STRONGEST WORK TO DATE

LEARNING TO CRAWL
Released 1984
Label Real Records/Sire
Chart positions
UK No.11 US No.5

THE PRETENDERS
GET CLOSE

The mid-80s was a turbulent time for the group. First, Chrissie teamed up with UB40 for a cover of Sonny & Cher's *I Got You Babe*, which topped the UK chart. Then the news broke that the line-up of the band had once again undergone significant changes, leaving fans wondering whether there would even be a fourth album.

Long-standing producer Chris Thomas, often dubbed 'the fifth Pretender,' was out and Steve Lillywhite was enlisted to take over his role. That union, however, didn't work out, and he too was soon out of the picture, with just a cover of Jimi Hendrix's *Room Full Of Mirrors* the only lasting remnant of his work with the band.

Next, Chrissie fired drummer Martin Chambers because she felt his playing had deteriorated and he still wasn't coping well emotionally with the deaths of his former bandmates. Appalled, bassist Malcolm Foster left the group in solidarity, leaving session musicians to shoulder the bulk of the recording.

The Pretenders had descended into a game of musical chairs – every time the music stopped, someone else was out. Fresh from working with Jim Kerr, Chrissie's then-husband, on Simple Minds' mammoth-selling hit record *Once Upon A Time*, Jimmy Iovine and Bob Clearmountain were drafted in to produce, and the result was an unfocused and often overblown affair.

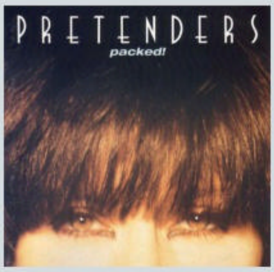
The singer's marriage is addressed on *I Remember You* and *When I Change My Life*, while *My Baby* is a tribute to Yasmin, her newborn daughter. *Don't Get Me Wrong* was an obvious choice of single as was the majestic *Hymn To Her* – a soaring power ballad penned by Chrissie's high school friend Meg Keene.

Fielding accusations that she had "mellowed" just because she was singing about her family, Hynde still spoke up when irked and the spiky *How Much Did You Get For Your Soul?* takes aim at the literal 'pop' stars selling out to soft drink sponsorship.

Overall, a mixed bag: despite the title, *Get Close* moves further away from The Pretenders as we know them than ever before.

GET CLOSE MOVES FURTHER AWAY FROM THE PRETENDERS AS WE KNOW THEM THAN EVER BEFORE

GET CLOSE
Released 1986
Label Real Records/Sire
Chart Positions
UK No.6 US No.25



Perhaps one of the more overlooked records in "The Pretenders" oeuvre – the quotation marks are intentional, since the album was dismissed upon release as essentially a Hynde solo effort, issued under the band's name to fulfil contractual obligations. In retrospect, it's puzzling why fans were so affronted by this notion – after all, every disc put out under The Pretenders' name consisted of songs written and performed by the singer with a supporting cast.

It is, however, very much a diluted version of The Pretenders – the songs are good but nothing stands up to their first three long-players.

With Mitchell Froom handling production, *Packed!* dispenses with the pomp and clutter that marred *Get Close*.

The Byrds-like pop-rocker *Never Do That* gets the album off to a solid start, evoking the blissful *Back On The Chain Gang*, before a faithful cover of Jimi Hendrix's *May This Be Love*, the gentle jangle of *When Will I See You* (co-written with Johnny Marr), and pacey tracks like *Downtown (Akron)*, *Hold A Candle To This*, and *No Guarantee* all hold up.

***How Do I Miss You* is also one of their better attempts at reggae.**

Far from the disaster it's often painted as, the low points are nowhere near as bad as those of its successful predecessor.

PACKED!
Released 1990
Label WEA/Sire
Chart Positions
UK No.19 US No.48

PRETENDERS
LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS

By the mid-90s, a new generation of female-fronted groups was tearing up the charts and if it wasn't blatantly obvious that their lairy godmother was a massive inspiration on their sneering stylings over riotous rock, their namedropping of Chrissie as a major inspiration in their interviews confirmed it.

Four years on from the underperforming *Packed!*, Chrissie's implicit intention for album number six was "let's write a hit song". Teaming up with songwriting duo Billy Steinberg and Tom Kelly (the men behind Cyndi Lauper's *True Colors*, The Bangles' *Eternal Flame* and Heart's *Alone* to name just a few), they exceeded expectations, penning two hit songs: *Night In My Veins* and the timeless ballad *I'll Stand By You*, both instant additions to any future Pretenders hits compilation, plus three other songs (including *Love Colours* and *977*).

Produced by Stephen Street and Ian Stanley, plus a returning Chris Thomas for one track, the album was the best thing to bear The Pretenders' name in at least a decade.

Opener *Hollywood Perfume* is Melrose Avenue via Madchester with its loops and 60s guitars, while Chrissie sings the blues on the beautiful piano ballad *977* with its haunting lyric about domestic abuse. *Revolution* is much better and not as preachy as the title suggests with its lush Fleetwood Mac-style harmonies on its chorus. The confident swagger of *Money Talk* is also a highpoint. A moving cover of Bob Dylan's *Forever Young* closes the album and pre-empts Chrissie's later LP of his work.

While it does occasionally lapse into some tired clichés and of-its-day trends, *Last Of...* could perhaps do without a couple of tracks (*I'm A Mother* being the weakest), but overall, the primary strength is that it sounds like The Pretenders once again.

Hynde has rarely sounded better; Martin Chambers returns on a handful of tracks, reaffirming his position as an integral part of their sound, while Adam Seymour earns his stripes as their best guitarist since James Honeyman-Scott. 'Return to form' is a much-overused term, but in this case it's justified.

THE PRIMARY STRENGTH OF *LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS* IS THAT IT SOUNDS LIKE THE PRETENDERS AGAIN

LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS
Released 1994
Label WEA/Sire
Chart Positions
UK No.8 US No.41

PRETENDERS
¡VIVA EL AMOR!

Five years after their last album, The Pretenders returned with another strong set, which not only acknowledged their legacy but built on it.

As well as the generation of artists they'd inspired, they now also found themselves sparring in the charts with that other prominent female-fronted outfit from the late 70s following the reformation of Blondie.

Last Of The Independents had restored the band's relevancy, and 1999's *¡Viva El Amor!* (Spanish for 'Long Live Love!') saw Hynde continue with the returning Chambers, guitarist Seymour and bassist Andy Hobson – a decision that offered a welcome sense of consistency.

The success of *...Independents* obviously boosted Hynde's confidence and she chose to once again take on the bulk of the album's songwriting solo, though her collaborations with Tom Kelly and Billy Steinberg for the lush Beatles-coded ballad *From The Heart Down*, the Stones-inspired stomp *Nails In The Road* and acerbic *Baby's Breath* ("Why did you send me roses?/ Save them for someone's death" she sings), provide stellar standout moments.

Who's Who is one of their poppiest tracks (it could almost be Texas), while *One More Time* is a Southern bluesy ballad with an incredible vocal. *Legalise Me* is a throwback to their punky roots. Meanwhile, closer *Biker* is a tender ballad about rebellion and non-conformism symbolised by the two-wheel traveller.

¡Viva El Amor! is another strong album – the abstract *Samurai* and clichéd *Dragway 42* are the only misfires – but it's the two singles that provide the highlights.

Popstar is a biting satire of celebrity culture, which lambasts manufactured divas and their 'sex sells' strategy. "They don't make them like they used to", Chrissie sneers.

Even better was their cover of Divinyls' *Human*. From The Kinks to Dylan, Hynde was never precious about covering other acts' songs if she felt she could bring something of herself to them and here she truly makes the track her own. Her vulnerability could not be more believable if it had come from her own pen. An assured set to commemorate their second decade in music.

> *¡VIVA EL AMOR!* PROVED AN ASSURED SET TO COMMEMORATE THE BAND'S SECOND DECADE IN MUSIC

¡VIVA EL AMOR!

Released 1999
Label WEA/Warner Bros
Chart Positions
UK No.32 SWE No.36

PRETENDERS
BREAK UP THE CONCRETE

While the ill-advised dubby detour of *Loose Screw* resulted in a lacklustre affair, 2008's rootsy rebirth brings a country-tinged ode to Americana which is a much better fit. Hynde's decision to leave London to spend some time back in her native Ohio turned out to be one of the best things she ever did in terms of reigniting her creativity, turning in some of her strongest songwriting in years.

With every new release by this point greeted with the tired debate over whether it is a Pretenders album or a Chrissie one, people needed to just accept that she *is* The Pretenders and always has been – her words, her voice. "I know we've looked like a Pretenders tribute band for 20 years," she joked at their induction into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame the previous year.

Break Up The Concrete finds her in fine form augmented by James Walbourne on guitar, Nick Wilkinson on bass, Eric Heywood on pedal steel and drummer Jim Keltner, the latter being a stylistic swap for this album only as Chrissie felt that Martin Chambers' drumming didn't suit the sound she wanted for the record.

With the gritty cover and raucous opener, the Bo Diddley-inspired *Boots Of Chinese Plastic*, you're lulled into a false sense of frenetic energy as it quickly dissipates with the soft, shuffling *The Nothing Maker* and Southern blues-backed *Don't Lose Faith In Me*. *Don't Cut Your Hair* takes the band's early fervour and feeds it through a rockabilly filter before a suite of mid-tempo cuts – *Love's A Mystery* and *The Last Ride* – are sung from a place of weary lived experience.

You Didn't Have To takes its cues from Neil Young's *Harvest Moon* era, while the title track and *Rosalee* possess a loose, throwdown feel. *One Thing Never Changed* brings the whole album to a wistful, mournful close.

Recorded in just 10 days, *Break Up The Concrete* is the sound of rejuvenation rather than rush job with everyone involved bringing their A-game with muscular performances.

Lyrically, the sarcasm has been toned down for the most part and replaced by introspection and a whole lot of heart.

> PEOPLE NEEDED TO JUST ACCEPT THAT HYNDE *IS* THE PRETENDERS AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN – HER WORDS, HER VOICE

BREAK UP THE CONCRETE

Released 2008
Label Shangri-La Music/ Rhino Records
Chart Positions
UK No.35 US No.32

PRETENDERS
LOOSE SCREW

The Pretenders hit a milestone on 2002's *Loose Screw* – it's the first album to keep the same line-up (Hynde, Hobson, Chambers and Seymour) for three consecutive records. Sadly, it is their weakest collection by far.

Neither of the upbeat rockers *Lie To Me* and *Fools Must Die* go anywhere and the chorus to the former is monotonous rather than catchy. They've always flirted with reggae and that influence becomes prevalent here. It's clear they were aiming for some kind of Lovers Rock vibe but unfortunately the tunes aren't there and *Time, Complex Person, Nothing Breaks Like A Heart* and *Clean Up Woman* all fall short.

Seeing Tom Kelly and Billy Steinberg's names on the credits instils hope that *Saving Grace* turns out to be just that – particularly as past collaborations with them yielded such great results. Sadly, it's not the case. A redundant cover of All Seeing I's *Walk Like A Panther* rounds off the album.

Bearing none of the hallmarks of what makes a good Pretenders record, *Loose Screw* is a baffling, forgettable release.

If there's a positive to take, it's that they were willing to experiment two decades into their career when they could have easily played it safe – unfortunately, the risk didn't pay off.

LOOSE SCREW

Released 2002
Label Artemis Records/Eagle
Chart Positions
UK No.55
US No.179

PRETENDERS
ALONE

Originally envisioned as a second Chrissie solo album to follow 2014's *Stockholm, Alone* (an obviously titillating title to provoke the line-up police!) was recorded with The Black Keys' mainman Dan Auerbach, a fellow native of Akron of whom she was a big fan.

As with the rootsy *Break Up The Concrete*, *Alone* was completed in just a couple of weeks with Chrissie heading to Nashville to record with a band assembled by Auerbach which included Johnny Cash's former bass player Dave Roe and guitarist Kenny Vaughan, alongside members of The Arcs – aka Dan's side project.

Struck down with a respiratory infection, Hynde recorded all of her vocals on the two final days, submitting a couple of takes for each song. Despite its circumstances, *Alone* is a solid effort with standouts including *Never Be Together, Let's Get Lost* (which was re-recorded as a duet with Neil Tennant for its release as a single) and Primal Scream co-write *Holy Commotion.*

Upon delivering it to the label, bosses commented that it sounded more like a Pretenders album than a Chrissie one.

She later said that she thought it should have been released as Dan Auerbach/Chrissie Hynde collaboration but in typically cool fashion instructed them to release it as "whichever is going to sell most copies!"

ALONE

Released 2016
Label BMG Rights
Chart Positions
UK No.40 US No.150

PRETENDERS
HATE FOR SALE

The 11th Pretenders album is a back-to-basics affair on which they collate their strengths and Chrissie welcomes back some old friends. The first record since 2002's disappointing *Loose Screw* to feature Chambers, Walbourne (who also co-wrote the entire LP with Chrissie) and Wilkinson, it was also the only album release to feature the line-up on the front cover since *Learning To Crawl* in 1984.

With Stephen Street back onboard, having last worked with the band on their pair of 90s hit releases *Last Of The Independents* and *¡Viva El Amor!*, the producer displays a genuine understanding of the group, framing them as a no-frills four-piece which works hugely in their favour.

Each song sounds fully fleshed out but never fussy, allowing the tight songwriting to take centre stage. Highlights are abundant, from the classic-sounding *The Buzz* (which sits comfortably beside classics such as *Kid*) and the glam stomp of *Turf Accountant Daddy*, to the Southern soul of *You Can't Hurt A Fool* and confident rocker *Maybe Love Is In NYC*.

Didn't Want To Be This Lonely sits firmly on the right side of power pop, while the scuzzy swagger of *Junkie Walk* and the title track take their cues from The Stooges.

The effortless switch-up to sombre ballad *Crying In Public* closes the album, which clocks in at just 30 minutes.

Originally scheduled for a spring 2020 launch, the world being plunged into a Covid-induced lockdown forced a rethink of the release strategy.

A huge tour across America with Journey was cancelled, and the album was delayed by a few months. However, confident in the material and eager for fans to hear it, the band drip-fed five singles in the lead-up to its July arrival.

Hate For Sale once again attracted that 'return to form' tag across the board, with many agreeing it was their best work since the mid-90s, and some even going so far as to say it usurped those records and was the strongest since 1984's *Learning To Crawl.*

Reaching a disappointing No.29 in the UK, *Hate For Sale* definitely deserved much better.

Of all the albums in their catalogue that would have benefited from a tour, it was surely this one.

> OF ALL THE ALBUMS IN THEIR CATALOGUE THAT WOULD HAVE BENEFITED FROM A TOUR, IT WAS *HATE FOR SALE*

HATE FOR SALE

Released 2020
Label BMG Rights
Chart Positions
UK No.29 SWI No.11

PRETENDERS
RELENTLESS

The most recent Pretenders album saw Chrissie and Walbourne continue the partnership which proved so fruitful on *Hate For Sale.* Once again, the pair wrote the entire LP together, remotely building on the foundation of the previous record with the intention of broadening the sonics. The result once more exceeded expectations and positioned The Pretenders as a band with far more to say musically than its legacy.

Kris Sonne takes his place behind the drumkit, Chris Hill and Dave Page share bass duties while Carwyn Ellis supplies keyboards and guitar.

David Wrench, whose credits include David Byrne, Blur, Goldfrapp and Erasure, was enlisted to produce the album.

Maybe not as immediate as *Hate For Sale, Relentless* instead chooses to reveal itself over time, embedding melodies and guitar licks into your subconscious and demanding repeated listens.

Losing My Sense Of Taste sets the tone, with *Let The Sun Come In* and *Vainglorious* the only real up-tempo tracks on display.

Elsewhere, moody soundscapes dominate, with *Promise Of Love, Look Away, Your House Is On Fire* and *Merry Widow* forming a surprisingly sedate album, given the misleading *Relentless* title.

A terrific collaboration with Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood on *Think About You Daily* delivers a majestic closing track.

Unanimously adored by critics, this robust, beautiful album shows that there is no limit on creativity.

Hynde is still finding new ways to express herself almost 50 years after she signed her first record deal. While we all thought we knew what to expect from a Pretenders record, the last few have taught us otherwise.

On Hynde's recently-released duets album, on which she collaborates with k.d. lang, Debbie Harry, Dave Gahan and Brandon Flowers among others, she grabs the 'Chrissie and pals' label that has been used to criticise her for decades and takes ownership of it.

A middle finger to her critics, it's yet another example of the great Pretender being one of music's most authentic figures.

> ADORED BY CRITICS, *RELENTLESS* IS A ROBUST, BEAUTIFUL ALBUM THAT SHOWS THERE IS NO LIMIT ON CREATIVITY

RELENTLESS

Released 2023
Label Parlophone
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James release the career-spanning 58-track compilation *Nothing But Love* on 21 November

“We’re not in a tribe. We always wanted to be more eXpansive than that.”

AS THE MANCHESTER LEGENDS RELEASE A WEIGHTY NEW 58-TRACK CAREER RETROSPECTIVE *NOTHING BUT LOVE*, TIM BOOTH, JIM GLENNIE AND SAUL DAVIES LOOK BACK ON THE MUCH-LOVED BAND’S MUSICAL TRIUMPHS (AND OCCASIONAL CAREER OWN GOALS…)

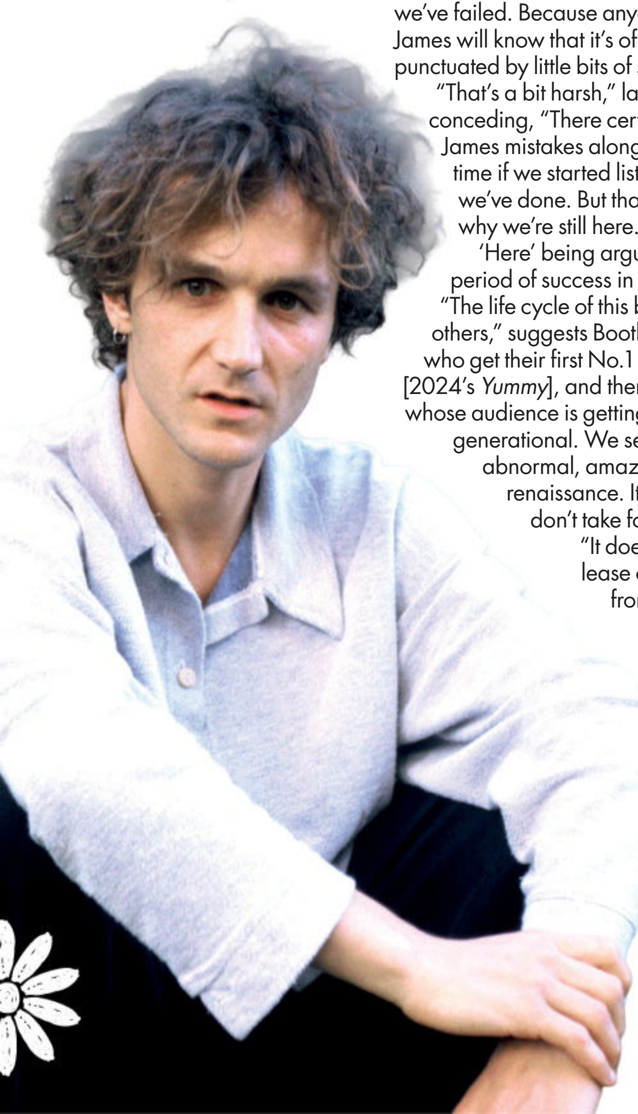
PAUL KIRKLEY

“I shouldn’t really be talking this long on a show day,” admits Tim Booth, when *Classic Pop* catches up with him in New York, a few hours before James are due on stage at the city’s Brooklyn Steel venue. The singer has been pressed into service to help sell the band’s new greatest hits collection – and is not, it has to be said, making a very good job of it. “To tell you the truth, I haven’t heard it,” he says. “It kind of doesn’t interest me. Other people put it together, and I got to have a say about which songs I wanted on it. But I just can’t face listening to our music in that way.

“I don’t look back. And also, it’s quite singles-based, and singles aren’t for me. We’re an art band who occasionally, luckily, have hit singles.”

Well, *Classic Pop* begs to differ. Because, yes, of course the Manchester outfit are far more than just a singles band. And, indeed, *Nothing But Love* – their new 58-track, 3CD/5LP ‘definitive best of’ collection – doesn’t just confine itself to their 45s. But, from anthems *Sit Down, She’s A Star* and *Laid* to fan favourites *Waltzing Along* and *Getting Away With It (All Messed Up)* as well as late-period gems like *Moving On* and *Love Make A Fool*, it also offers a compelling case for James being one of the finest singles bands of the past 40 years.

In August 1990, James supported David Bowie at Maine Road in Manchester and The Cure at London's Crystal Palace Bowl



Tim Booth, pictured in the 90s, when James scored a trio of UK Top 5 albums – *Gold Mother*, *Seven* and *Laid*

"Okay, I trust you on that," smiles Booth.

Thankfully, Jim Glennie – the band's founder member, and the man from whom they take their name – needs no convincing. "They're like time machines, these best of albums, aren't they?" says the ever-amiable bassist. "There's been a lot of work put into pulling this together, to make it a definitive collection, and retracing our steps through all the different periods has been wonderful."

"I'm very proud of this record," agrees Saul Davies, the multi-instrumentalist who's been part of the group since 1989. "We've written some fucking massive tunes over the years, and this does feel like a celebration of everything that we've achieved – and also where we've failed. Because anyone who knows the story of James will know that it's often been one long failure, punctuated by little bits of success."

"That's a bit harsh," laughs Glennie, before conceding, "There certainly have been some great James mistakes along the way. We'd be here some time if we started listing all the stupid things we've done. But that's who we are, and that's why we're still here."

'Here' being arguably the most sustained period of success in the band's storied history.

"The life cycle of this band feels very different to others," suggests Booth. "There aren't many bands who get their first No.1 album after 40-odd years [2024's *Yummy*], and there aren't many people whose audience is getting bigger and more cross-generational. We seem to be having some abnormal, amazing, uplifting, celebratory renaissance. It's something we definitely don't take for granted."

"It does feel like we've had a new lease of life," concurs Glennie, fresh from a triumphant summer of outdoor headline shows. "Plus we're getting on really well, which has not always been the case with James. That makes it a completely different experience. Because we've always managed to enjoy what we do, musically, but it's been very easy to balls things up – by being childish idiots."

Life with Brian

"Whenever we have a problem with a song, I go to Brian, and he sorts it out pretty quickly," says Tim Booth, of James' long association with visionary producer Brian Eno, dating back to 1993's *Laid* album. "That relationship is one of the great joys of my life."

"Brian can be quite mechanical, in an interesting, intellectual kind of way," notes Saul Davies. "But, at the same time, he is always interested in capturing the *heart* of the song. He trusts us to play as a band. I don't know if people like him really exist anymore – the industry always wants a certain *type* of record, where it's got to be as tight as fuck. And our records are sloppy."

"Sloppy but beautiful," concurs Jim Glennie.

"Brian was also the first person I ever heard talk about the internet," recalls Davies. "We were having dinner one night, while making *Laid*, and he said, 'Have any of you halfwits heard of the worldwide web? It's like a global electronic network where people can send letters to each other'... And we were all like, 'What's the point in that? It sounds shit!'"

STUTTERING START

Emerging from Manchester's Whalley Range in 1982, James established an early reputation for bloody-mindedness that regularly tipped over into self-sabotage. ("These are the nobheads who turned down the fucking cover of the *NME*," says Davies, with an eye-roll.) Take their debut EP, 1983's *Jimone*, from which *Nothing But Love*'s opener, *What's The World*, is taken: is it true they chose the three songs on that record because they thought they were their worst ones? "Yeah," says Booth. "We were going into a recording studio for the first time, and we knew we'd fuck it up. So we didn't want to fuck it up with our best songs." It's a very James story.

Having released their first three EPs on Factory, the band famously turned down Tony Wilson's offer of an album deal, instead releasing 1986's *Stutter* via Seymour Stein's Sire – something they all came to regret. "Tony was a great guy – but we'd been brought up on the *NME*'s doctrine that record companies were the big bad wolves," says Booth. "When, in reality, Factory were the good guys, and we went running straight into the arms of the big bad wolf, which was Sire. Then we got on the wrong end of Seymour Stein, which is why he didn't release our album for a year-and-a-half... He starved us out."

James pictured in 1991, the year the band had a UK No.2 hit single with a re-recorded version of *Sit Down*

Despite support slots with The Fall and The Smiths – the latter were early James champions, even playing *What's The World* in their own set – the band struggled to break through. "When I joined, it was very scratchy, a bit of a struggle," recalls Davies, who was recruited after catching the attention of then-guitarist Larry Gott with his virtuosity on the violin. "I thought it would probably collapse within a week, or a month, tops. And then luck started to fall our way."

GOLDEN GOOSE

For all their obstinacy, there were times when James' cast-iron self-belief proved well-founded – like the occasion they challenged Rough Trade label boss Geoff Travis over his failure to promote their 1989 single *Sit Down*. "I said to Geoff, 'we know this is a killer song, and you did nothing with it'," recalls Booth. "And he said, 'Tim, you have to realise you are never going to sell more than 20,000 records in your lifetime'. So we bought the *Gold Mother* album back off him for 25 grand, took it to Mercury, and it sold millions."

Nothing But Love features both the original *Sit Down*, and the re-recorded 1991 hit that would become James' signature anthem. "It was a phenomenon, we loved it," says Booth. "But then it started to overshadow all our other babies, like *Ring The Bells* or *Sometimes*, which we thought were equally important, beautiful pieces of music. So we got a bit salty around it at one point.

"But, when you get older, you realise there's one song that kicks down the door and the others follow through. And *Sit Down* was that song. We started to realise how important it was for people. And now we totally own it."

More recently, the song has taken on a very personal meaning for Tim. "When my father-in-law was dying of Covid, we had our last moment with him on FaceTime, with a nurse holding the camera up for him," he recalls. "He could barely talk, this beautiful man, but he asked me to sing *Sit Down*. So I sang *Sit Down*. And it changed my relationship to that song."

In 1993, the Brian Eno-produced *Laid* made inroads in the US, thanks to its college radio hit title track. But by the middle of the decade, the band – who watched support acts from Nirvana to Radiohead go on to eclipse their star – had "pretty much collapsed into addiction", says Booth. As a non-drinker whose early years had been plagued by a liver condition – aged 21, he'd died and been revived in a Leeds hospital – Booth "spent a lot of that decade watching people potentially destroy themselves from the sidelines."

A ruptured disc in his neck and a £250,000 tax bill added to the group's woes and, in 2001, the singer decided to call it a day.

At first, the band resolved to continue without him. "I thought it was worth a go, and Tim was happy for us to keep the name," recalls Glennie. "But it just didn't work out." In 2007, an initially reluctant Booth was persuaded back for what the bassist remembers as a "quick lunch and a jam in a rehearsal room, just to see if anything was there".

Following the release of *Pleased To Meet You* in 2001, Tim Booth left James but returned to the band for 2008's *Hey Ma*

> "The world needs uplifting voices right now... we are trying to unify people."
>
> TIM BOOTH

Two decades and nine albums later, James' second act shows no sign of losing momentum. "The last six or seven years, in particular, have been the best we've ever had," says Booth. "Our relationships today are amazing. What Jim and I, in particular, have been through, is remarkable. It's gone from love to hate – there was time when he really didn't like me – and back to love again. Not many people get the opportunity to go on that journey together. I really value that."

James are also on a mission to spread that message of unity further afield. As a lyricist, Booth has taken to tackling modern ills head on. But he also sings about beauty, magic and spiritual renewal. Of the two new songs on *Nothing But Love*, one, *Wake Up, Superman*, is a ripped-from-the-headlines diatribe against Trump's United States, in which the country's most famous immigrant finds himself "caught in an ICE sting", and the other, *Hallelujah Anyhow*, reads like a secular prayer to the healing power of nature.

"The world needs uplifting voices right now," says the singer. "I write songs that can be quite critical of certain beliefs or organisations. But at the same time, we are trying to unify people. There are moments, when we're playing, when the whole crowd becomes one, and you think, 'holy shit'. It's tangible. We're aware that we're part of something that's bigger than us."

***"We're like the E-Street Band, a nine-piece band with a trumpet player, violin, cello, guitars… two amazing drummers"* Tim Booth**

This month, James will tour Latin America with dates in Chile, Peru, Brazil and Mexico

An evolution of attitudes

"Two of the original members of the band ended up in Strangeways," recalls Tim Booth, of his initiation into the famously roughneck early James line-up. "I entered a tough little band, and a lot of their fans in the early days wanted to test out the posh kid from university."

By his own admission, the young Jim Glennie – who first met Booth while trying to steal his pint in a student disco, and later nicknamed the privately educated singer 'Monty Moneybags' – was a bit of a hooligan. "I spent many years being embarrassed – ashamed, I suppose – of the person I used to be," he says. "I was an angry young man. I had issues. I grew up in a shitty bit of Manchester [Moss Side] and my behaviour was probably about survival, to some degree. But also just kind of adrenaline and frustration."

The band, says Booth, "took it in turns to be dickheads over the years", but thankfully the current line-up – Glennie, Booth and Davies plus guitarist Adrian Oxaal, trumpeter Andy Diagram, keyboardist Mark Hunter, additional vocalist Chloë Alper and drummers David Baynton-Power and Debbie Knox-Hewson – are a model of domestic harmony. "When we reformed in 2007, we came back with a very different attitude to each other," says Glennie. "We're much more sensitive and understanding. It was the beginning of a whole new relationship."

LIVING IN THE PRESENT

As for the future, Booth's final words on the new record don't exactly inspire confidence. "What a life," he sings in the outro of *Hallelujah Anyhow*. "This one's nearly over". It's the second album in a row the 65-year-old has finished with a meditation on death, following *Yummy*'s closing statement of, "See you on the other side, I won't cling on to this life".

Surely he – and the band – have got a few miles left on the clock yet? "I hope James will go on 'til we die, but I don't take anything for granted," he says, matter-of-factly. "I like living with the idea of death being at close proximity. It helps me live in the present."

Davies strikes a more optimistic note: with the band still writing around 120 songs a year, he wouldn't rule out an *even more definitive* Best Of further down the line. "I'd like to think that, in 10 years' time, we'll have enough for another one," he smiles.

For all their resurgent success, though, is there perhaps a sense that James still haven't entirely been given the critical dues they're so clearly owed? "I'm sure if we went away for 15 years and came back, like the Pixies or Oasis, there'd be a reappraisal," suggests Booth. "Because we're continuously working artists, we can be taken for granted a bit."

Thanks in part to their improvisational writing method – assembled from hundreds of jams, with scant regard for traditional song structures – they are also a tricky band to categorise. "I think that's been part of our problem, in the past," nods Glennie. "We never wanted to be dictated by any particular rules or parameters. We're not in a tribe. We always wanted to be more expansive than that."

"We *are* hard to categorise as a band," agrees Booth. "I hate the term 'indie band'. I think we're more like the E-Street Band. We're a nine-piece band with a trumpet player, violin, cello, guitars… two amazing drummers. The idea is to leave behind an artistic legacy that people will eventually catch up on."

"As a band, we've always felt like we had something to prove," concludes Glennie. "And I think that's what's fuelled us. If we'd had massive success, I doubt very much we'd still be here now. And I like being here." ■

● ***Nothing But Love – The Definitive Best Of James* is released on 21 November via UMR and reviewed on page 88**

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MAKE IT BIG

BIG COUNTRY BROKE OUT OF THE NEW WAVE WITH A WIDESCREEN VISION AND DISTINCTLY SCOTTISH BRAND OF HEARTLAND BLUE-COLLAR ROCK. CO-FOUNDER AND GUITARIST BRUCE WATSON RECOUNTS THEIR BITTERSWEET JOURNEY WHILE KEEPING THE LEGACY ALIVE.

FELIX ROWE

In 1982, Big Country burst onto the horizon with a swell of duelling guitars, rumbling drums and lofty ideals. Theirs was an expansive, widescreen vista, tapping into Celtic tradition, yet contemporary to the core. A kind of Springsteen-esque blue-collar heartland rock – if Bruce had grown up in the Scottish Lowlands. Like the Boss, their gritty anthems carried a sense of hope, born in a small town and reaching for something greater.

Big Country was the creation of visionary frontman, Stuart Adamson, and another Bruce – guitarist, Bruce Watson.

They were both ex-punks from Dunfermline, Adamson had seen some success as guitarist of the Skids, whose 1979 single, *Into The Valley*, made the UK Top 10. But by the third Skids record explains Watson, "Stuart was getting a bit restless", and scoped out Bruce for a new project. "About a year later he turned up at my flat and said, 'Look, I've left the band, do you want to get this new thing together?' I don't think Stuart knew what he wanted to do at that point. It was just one of those suck it and see kind of things."

BIG
COUNTRY
THE CROSSING

They spent a month or so "working with a little drum machine, a couple of guitars, a synthesizer and this little tape machine." The resulting tracks formed the core of their first album, 1983's *The Crossing*.

They assembled a band, though early gigs were brutal. "Our management put us out [on the road] with Alice Cooper. It was sink or swim. We did a couple of dates and the crew manager just said, 'Look, this ain't working, boys.' I mean, we weren't that great, and Alice's fans certainly let us know by throwing bottles of piss at us. It was a learning curve."

PIVOTAL POSITIONS

Back as a duo, they just needed the right vehicle to drive them forward. The answer came in the form of bassist Tony Butler and drummer, Mark Brzezicki, who had performed on Stuart's final Skids tour in the support act, On The Air. The formidable pair had established themselves as 'Rhythm for Hire' – 'the Sly and Robbie of Soho', in reference to the famed session players.

"They were well known in recording circles as a shit-hot rhythm section," says Bruce. Indeed, Butler had turned down The Pretenders to commit to Big Country. Their arrival proved pivotal, injecting further vivacity and motion into Adamson's rousing anthems.

Initial recordings for the band's debut with producer Chris Thomas yielded promising results, though progress was

Big Country, featuring Tony Butler, Stuart Adamson, Mark Brzezicki and Bruce Watson, scored a No.3 album in the UK with *The Crossing* in 1983

© Alamy

© Getty

"Our management put us out on the road with Alice Cooper. It was a learning curve."

BRUCE WATSON

***In A Big Country* peaked at No.17 in both the US and UK singles charts**

frustratingly slow while Thomas juggled simultaneous sessions with Elton John in Montserrat. "Steve Lillywhite's name came up," explains Bruce. Though working with U2 at the time, Lillywhite became available for a couple of days, choosing *Fields Of Fire* from their demo tape as a potential single. "And that turned out how it turned out. It was absolutely amazing." Evidently, Lillywhite was the final piece of the puzzle. Famed for his thunderous drum sounds achieved with Siouxsie Sioux and the like, his touch helped secure a Top 10 hit.

"We thought, 'Oh man, we still need to get somebody to do this album!' And then Steve got back in touch and said, 'U2 have moved something, so I've got a six-week window.' So, big thanks to U2 for moving their calendar!"

SOLID GROUND

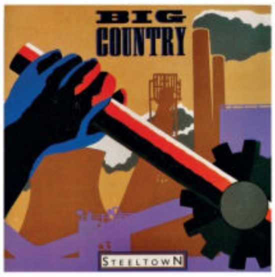
Their debut, *The Crossing* is grounded in the earth – raw and rugged, solid and unflinching, like the landscape evoked in its lyrics, conjuring up harvests and fields of fire and lovers' voices on mountainsides. That expansive outlook became a defining trademark. "We always treated the music almost like a mini soundtrack for a movie that didn't exist", says Bruce.

Much is made of Big Country's Celtic roots – bagpipe-like guitars and melodic traditionalism. But Watson is ready to shatter a few myths. Their signature sound, he says, was more by accident than design.

"There was only one unwritten rule that Stuart and myself had: We didn't want to go down the blues route. Thin Lizzy, Status Quo, Wishbone Ash had done that – we loved all those bands, but we didn't want to just do that twin guitar thing. So, we thought, no bending notes, no blues, we'll just play the melodies.

"I think that's why people said, 'Oh, it sounds like bagpipes!' But it's basically because it was more like electric folk as opposed to electric blues. At the end of the day, it's all rock."

So, it wasn't a conscious decision? "No. I think that was just an easy way for the press and even the record company to describe what we sound like. I mean, we didn't mind, because nobody else was doing that kind of thing." In fact, Watson's own youth was spent lapping up Slade and The Sensational Alex Harvey Band, before being turned on to The Clash, and post-punks Magazine and Wire. And while they didn't follow the synth-pop path, they certainly weren't averse to its charms.



"A lot of our early demos had synthesizers. In this little studio, we had those two keyboards. We didn't even have stands; they were sitting on ironing boards. But, both of us being guitar players, that was the way to go. I couldn't imagine us with Human League haircuts, but we could have gone down that route. And I love The Human League as well."

The Crossing was a No.3 hit in the UK, made inroads in the United States, and did particularly well in Europe – Germany would become a home-from-home. More recently, *In A Big Country* found new favour, appearing in the 2023 film, *Air*, directed by Ben Affleck.

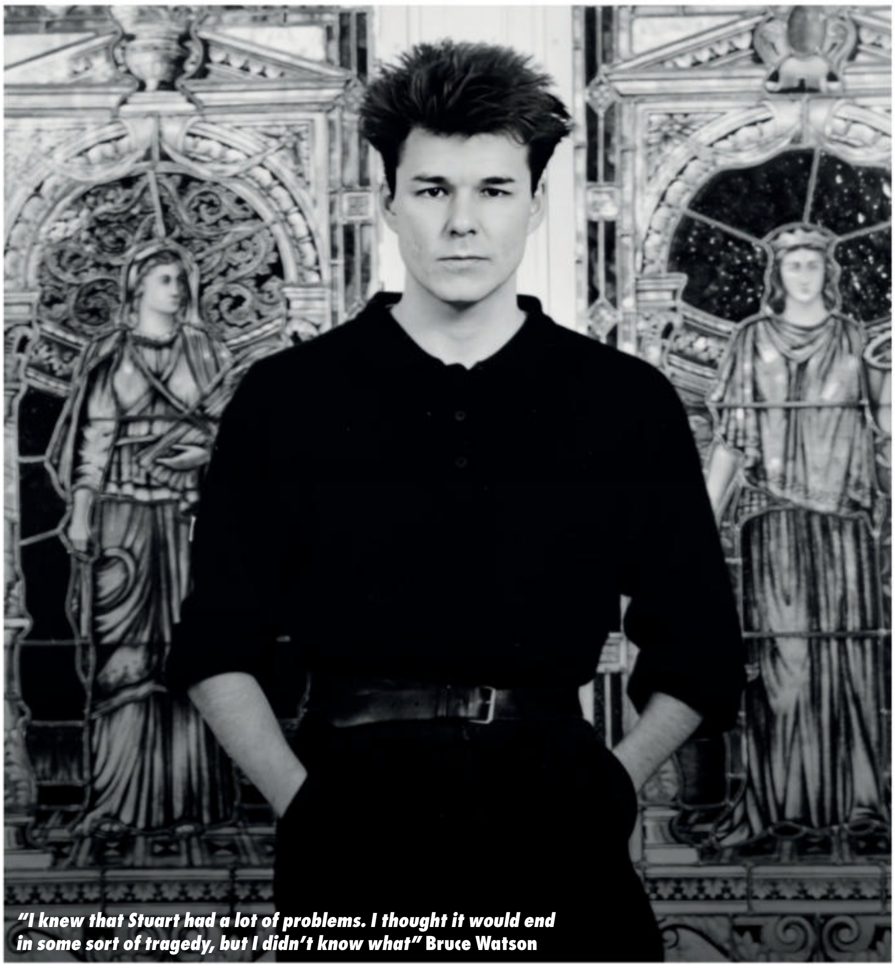
> "We always treated the music like a mini soundtrack for a movie that didn't exist…"
>
> BRUCE WATSON

Big Country retained all the power and attack of their roots, but had developed a grander vision. While punk was inherently nihilistic, tearing down traditional institutions, the question remained: what do you build in their place? Stuart Adamson seemed intent on filling that void, offering optimism and dignity among the defiance.

Adamson's words were often ambiguous and poetic, drawing inspiration from real life, whether his own or observed. He sang like someone with something to say, pairing the grim realities of the lyrics with the uplifting feel of the music. "Stuart was a big reader as well," Watson reveals. "He was reading a lot of books on the Vietnam War."

These themes developed on their second album, and only No.1, 1984's *Steeltown*, partly recorded at ABBA's Polar Studios in Stockholm. (During this time, Brzezicki played drums on Frida Lyngstad's solo record, *Shine*, while Adamson contributed the song, *Heart Of The Country* – the common link being producer, Lillywhite.)

Stuart Adamson backstage on the Steeltown Tour in 1984 with support act Zerra One's Paul Bell



"I knew that Stuart had a lot of problems. I thought it would end in some sort of tragedy, but I didn't know what" **Bruce Watson**

"It was during the Falklands War and the Miners' Strike," says Bruce, of *Steeltown*. There is an obvious parallel to be drawn with Springsteen's *Born In The U.S.A.*, released in the same year – patriotism laced with cynicism, working class toil amid broken industry, beleaguered soldiers – in some ways, eerily relevant today.

"Stuart was just writing about what was happening at the time," acknowledges Watson. "In the 80s, it was grim everywhere. Sometimes people forget, it was still Cold War time."

A-LIST SUPPORT

BIG COUNTRY
THE SEER

Since that fledgling outing with Alice Cooper, Big Country had developed into a live tour de force, securing much-coveted support spots – from The Jam's 1982 farewell tour to Freddie Mercury's final Queen show at Knebworth in 1986 – and also opening for their hero, David Bowie the following year. "Bowie was abnormally normal. He was a right chain smoker. I wouldn't say that the Glass Spider Tour was one of his best... When you go on tour, you still expect to hear a lot of the hits you've had in the past, and he tended to ignore a lot of his catalogue then. A lot of people were going, 'Play *Jean Genie* for God's sake!' But he was still amazing."

Meanwhile, Mick Jagger called them, "One of the best opening acts we've ever had." "He never said it to me," says Bruce, beaming. "But if he did say that, that's a brilliant compliment. We had two tours with The Rolling Stones. They were absolute gentlemen, and again, abnormally normal. Except that they are the biggest rock and roll band in the world."

Big Country's trajectory was typical of many bands. "The first three albums are quintessential Big Country," says Bruce. "They all work together in different ways. *Steeltown*, is completely different from the first LP. It's hard and nasty and in-your-face. *The Seer* is more romantic and mystical. And then, the album we did after that, *Peace In Our Time*, is the one that most fans sort of hate. Sonically, it's a great sounding record, but it's not a great album."

From here, the band's fortunes wavered, never quite reaching the same heights, though remaining a compelling live act. The Kinks' Ray Davies even co-opted them as his Glastonbury 1997 backing band. But struggles surfaced when Adamson briefly went missing in 1999. The troubled frontman tragically took his own life in a Honolulu hotel room, in 2001.

"I knew there was something wrong," says Bruce. "Obviously, Stuart had problems with alcohol." By now, Stuart had relocated to Nashville, disconnected from their old Dunfermline haunts. "When somebody moves thousands of miles away, you just don't know what's going on. You maybe meet up months later when you're ready to go on tour or do an album. But obviously, I knew that he had a lot of problems.

"I thought it would end up in some sort of tragedy but I didn't know what, so it was horrible when it happened. It's hard to explain, but you just get a feeling."

While respected by fans and peers, Adamson remains overlooked. "I don't think he got the recognition that he deserved," continues Bruce. "But I think

SOUNDS OF LOVE (A DEAL WITH KATE)

Big Country collaborated with Kate Bush on the title track to their third album, *The Seer*. "We had one song," Bruce Watson explains, "in the same vein as what Kate had done on *The Dreaming*. We were into Kate Bush anyway, we didn't copy anything, but it was just a little bit reminiscent. I think maybe Stuart had said to Robin Millar, the producer, 'it'd be great if we could get Kate Bush to sing on this', just as a throwaway comment, and Robin went, 'I'll fucking phone her then.' What?"

Thankfully, Kate was keen. "So, we sent her the cassette and she came up to Robin's studio." Clearly, Bush took the challenge seriously. "She spent five hours in there and it's not like a backing vocal or a duet, it was like she just completely rearranged the whole thing. It was unbelievable what she did. We were up in the control room and she was in the studio room and we could see her from above. We were blown away."

The only frustration was when the label rejected Robin's original mix. "It kind of pissed me off at the end when the album got remixed again, and I felt like Kate's vocals had been pushed back a little bit. I just felt the version that Robin did, her vocals were right up there. What she'd done was amazing. It was just all these different parts. It wasn't just harmonies; she completely rewrote the vocal parts. Genius."

Big Country in 2025, featuring Reece Dobbin, Chris Stones, Tommie Paxton, Bruce and Jamie Watson

© MB Photography Scotland

it's maybe because people like that are quite honest. Stuart was very serious when it came down to talking about his songs. And I think a lot of journalists thought, 'Oh, he's a bit po-faced.' But in real life, he wasn't anything like that. He was one of the funniest guys I've ever met. A natural comedian."

Bruce remains assured of Adamson's impact. "It's a gift. It's all there in the songs, these lyrics. If you listen to *Fragile Thing* [from 1999's *Driving To Damascus*], you can just tell he's different."

ONWARD JOURNEYS

Years earlier, Adamson had given his blessing for Mike Peters of The Alarm to fill his position should he ever become unavailable – a prescient succession plan in hindsight. After a brief reunion to honour their fallen friend, bassist Butler retired in 2012. Simple Minds' Derek Forbes stepped in on bass, alongside Mike Peters and Bruce's son Jamie, for 2013's *The Journey*.

More recent personnel changes have been decidedly messier, culminating in the departure of Brzezicki along with vocalist Simon Hough in 2024. A strange turn of events that has seen two distinct entities touring as Big Country...

"I don't know where Mark's at," says Bruce. "To be honest with you, I did that tour with Mark last year and he just left halfway through, decided he didn't like the way things were going."

The memory still seems raw. "And then a couple of months later, they start a band up and call it Big Country."

In the UK, Brzezicki and Hough's splinter group is billed as From Big Country, though on a recent US tour, that all-important prefix was dropped. How does that sit in terms of who owns the band name?

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm Big Country," says Bruce. "I mean, it's actually in the public domain that they've left Big Country."

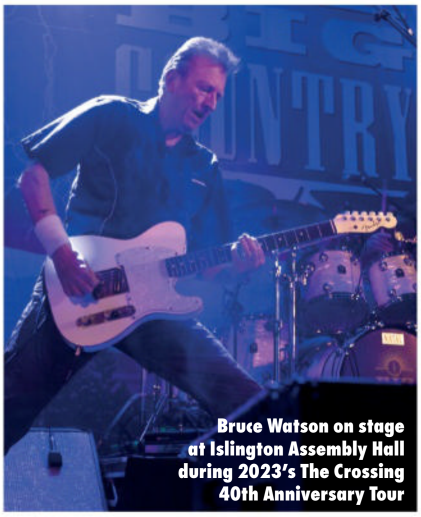
But the show must go on. The current official line-up includes Jamie Watson, and new recruits Tommie Paxton on vocals and guitar, bassist Chris Stones and drummer Reece Dobbin. "Tommie and Chris came from a Big Country tribute band called Restless Natives," explains Bruce. "They actually knew the songs better than I did, practically."

It's a surreal twist of fate, graduating from a tribute band to becoming official members. "They really take care of the songs, they're really respectful. It's a labour of love for them."

There's a new Big Country album in the works, with Bruce fleshing out old seeds of ideas originally worked on with Stuart back in the day. "I've always wanted to develop songs like that to how I thought they should have been finished. So, I've completely re-recorded them with a new line-up and just rearranged the songs and made them a bit more contemporary."

And Big Country have a busy touring schedule, taking in Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia, before heading back to Germany, followed by a UK tour in December, featuring support from old friend, Toyah Willcox. "Toyah's brilliant. She's a big... a *small* bundle of energy. She's just nonstop."

And when it comes to choosing the setlist, rest assured, he won't be 'doing a Bowie'. "We'll be doing a few of the songs off the album as well as the usual suspects... Our first album had all the hits on it. You've got to play those songs or people wouldn't come and see you again!" ■



Bruce Watson on stage at Islington Assembly Hall during 2023's The Crossing 40th Anniversary Tour

THE MIKE PETERS YEARS

Mike Peters fronted Big Country from 2010 to 2013, and returned for more recent dates, before he sadly passed away in April this year, following a long battle with cancer. "I got really friendly with Mike," says Bruce. "He came out and did some stuff with us, and it was brilliant. I've done a lot of writing with Mike. He was a person I could work with quite easily. But again, Mike's kind of like Stuart, you know, there's just something there that's unique."

Once again, Bruce had to come to terms with losing another friend. It was a long time coming, as Mike battled his illness.

"Mike was a fighter... he used to fight it and fight it. At the end, when I spoke to him beforehand, he was going in for treatment, and I just assumed he was going to be all right because every time he went into hospital and was on a new regime, he always came out the other side.

"He came out on the last tour that I did last year. He did about six weeks with us, and I could see it was hard.

"Some nights he was great, but on others he was struggling because it was physical. Some nights I was like, 'Oh, Mike, calm down a wee bit.' But he would never do that. You'll never get Mike off the stage. He was just 100 per cent."

- **Big Country tour with special guest Toyah from 12-17 December. For further details, visit the band's website at bigcountry.co.uk**

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HOWARD JONES
NIK KERSHAW
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"THE BAND ALWAYS BELIEVED WE WERE GOING TO ASCEND AGAIN – AND IT'S HAPPENED!"
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CLASSIC POP

TOP TEN

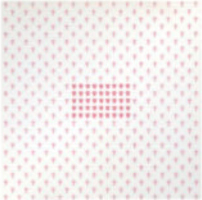
WEEK ENDING 8 DECEMBER 1984

FRANKIE TOPPLES JIM DIAMOND'S POWER BALLAD TO CLAIM A THIRD CONSECUTIVE NO.1, WHILE MACCA AND MADONNA NOTCH MEMORABLE HITS

STEVE O'BRIEN

▲ 01 (3) **THE POWER OF LOVE**
FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
(ZTT)

▼ 02 (1) **I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER**
JIM DIAMOND (A&M)



THE POWER OF LOVE FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

(ZTT)

Frankie's third single was the one that proved that there was more to these Scouse provocateurs than simple shock value. Who could have foreseen that this group who once appeared on *The Tube* in fetish get-up singing about ejaculation could be capable of a song this tender? There isn't even a hint in irony in Holly Johnson's powerhouse vocal, though allusions to Penelope Pitstop ("I'll protect you from the Hooded Claw") amid the song's more schmalzy lyrics ("I'm so in love with you/ Dreams are like angels") help it from becoming a total slushfest. Even years later, its singer still clearly rated it: "I always felt like *The Power Of Love* was the record that would save me in this life," Johnson told *The Guardian* in 2012. While we're here, the single's 12" mix features *Red Dwarf* actor Chris Barrie doing a generic DJ voice, to mimic Mike Read's banning of *Relax* ("I've just looked at the cover – I think it's obscene!").

SEXCRIME (nineteen eighty-four)
1984
EURYTHMICS

SEXCRIME (NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR) EURYTHMICS

(VIRGIN)

The story behind the music for Michael Radford's 1984 cinematic adaptation of George Orwell's GCSE favourite is quite a saga. The director requested an orchestral score (already completed by Dominic Muldowney), but Virgin Films wanted something more pop-oriented, so as to get an accompanying single into the charts to help publicise the movie. After David Bowie asked for too much cash, they approached Eurythmics, who laid down two songs for the soundtrack – *Sexcrime* and *Julia* – amid various instrumental pieces. In the end, two versions of the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* film were released, one with Dave and Annie's synth-driven score and the other with Muldowney's more traditional music. Eurythmics' work was released as an album, *1984 (For The Love Of Big Brother)*, which peaked at No.23 in the UK.

JIM DIAMOND
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER JIM DIAMOND

(A&M)

Though he was in his mid-thirties and looked ancient enough to be the dad of most of the other acts on *Top Of The Pops* in December 1984, *I Should Have Known Better* was Jim Diamond's first solo hit. He had, however, been in the showbiz game since the late 60s and played in the bands Bandit and Ph.D. – who were fondly remembered for their mega-selling 1982 smasheroo, *I Won't Let You Down*. No.1 for just one week before Frankie nudged it, this epic power ballad (complete with its piercing "I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, Is") was the lead 45 from Diamond's debut long-player *Double Crossed* and would be, somewhat sadly, the first of just two Top 10 hits for the Glasgow-born singer-songwriter (the second being *Hi Ho Silver*, the theme tune to the ITV biker drama *Boon*).

THE RIDDLE NIK KERSHAW

(MCA)

There are doubtless scores of essays and theses that have been written about this esoteric head-scratcher (sample lyric: "I got two strong arms/ Blessings of Babylon/ Time to carry on/ And try for sins and false alarms"), but truth is, there never was any deep meaning behind Nik Kershaw's profound-on-the-outside lead satellite from his studio album of the same name. Surprisingly, it was one of the last songs written for the LP after his label said they couldn't hear a single. "So I went back upstairs and I wrote the tune to *The Riddle* very, very quickly, literally in about 10 to 15 minutes," the singer told *Classic Pop* in 2023. "It didn't have any lyrics, I thought, well, they can come later, that's fine. So I did what I still do now, and that is when you know what the tune is, you just want to nail down the rhyming scheme, so you just put a load of nonsense down."

▲ 03 (4) **THE RIDDLE**
NIK KERSHAW
(MCA)

▲ 04 (6) **SEX CRIME**
(NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR)
EURYTHMICS (VIRGIN)

▲ 05 (7) **TEARDROPS**
SHAKIN' STEVENS
(EPIC)

▼ 06 (2) **I FEEL FOR YOU**
CHAKA KHAN
(WARNER)

▲ 07 (11) **I WON'T RUN AWAY**
ALVIN STARDUST
(CHRYSALIS)

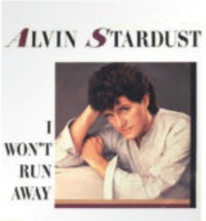
▲ 08 (27) **LIKE A VIRGIN**
MADONNA
(SIRE)

▲ 09 (39) **WE ALL STAND TOGETHER**
PAUL McCARTNEY & THE FROG CHORUS
(PARLOPHONE)

▼ 10 (5) **THE NEVERENDING STORY**
LIMAHL
(EMI)

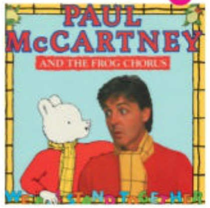
TEARDROPS
SHAKIN' STEVENS
(EPIC)

Though it's hardly in the toe-tapping league of *This Ole House* or *Green Door*, the fact that Welsh rocker Shakin' Stevens could still enjoy a hit with something this lifeless is a testament to his giddying popularity in the 80s. This self-penned number was taken from *Greatest Hits*, an imaginatively-titled 1984 album made up of previous successes and a dusting of new songs, this included. If you can hear a little of vintage Cliff Richard in the track, that's likely because it's Hank Marvin from The Shadows on guitar duty. Two other songs from the album were released – *A Letter To You* (No.10) and *Breaking Up My Heart* (No.14), while Shaky continued to have hits well into the second half of the 80s.



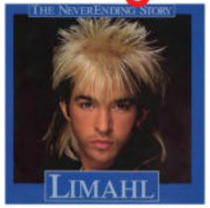
I WON'T RUN AWAY
ALVIN STARDUST
(CHRYSALIS)

It wasn't just Shaky who was bringing a bit of retro magic to the hit parade in 1984, fellow revivalist Alvin Stardust also put out this cheery 70s-style pop-rocker written by John David and produced by Stuart Colman. But after more than a decade of hits, *I Won't Run Away* would be the final Top 10 success for the artist formerly known as Shane Fenton (born Bernard William Jewry), with subsequent singles *So Near To Christmas* (1984) and *Got A Little Heartache* (1985) peaking at No.29 and No.55, respectively. Focussing on his acting career in the later years of his life, Stardust died following a brief illness in 2014 at the age of 72.



WE ALL STAND TOGETHER
PAUL McCARTNEY & THE FROG CHORUS (PARLOPHONE)

Even as a Beatle, Paul McCartney wasn't above writing a simple children's song – hence *All Together Now* for the Fab Four's *Yellow Submarine* movie – and he'd even covered *Mary Had A Little Lamb* with Wings in 1972. *We All Stand Together*, then, shouldn't have surprised anyone, though we can't help thinking that, had he been alive, John Lennon would have ripped the piss out of him.



THE NEVERENDING STORY
LIMAHL (EMI)

When Limahl was ousted from Kajagoogoo, there weren't too many who were thinking, "Well, his best days are ahead of *him*." But lo and behold, this Giorgio Moroder and Keith Forsey-penned track for the film of the same name would gift the singer his pension plan. While the movie isn't talked about much these days, the song very much is, having enjoyed a revival in 2019 when it soundtracked the final episode of the third season of *Stranger Things*.

I FEEL FOR YOU
CHAKA KHAN
(WARNER)

This former UK chart-topper seems so quintessentially Chaka Khan that it was a shock for many to learn that it was a Prince song. That said, when the Purple One originally recorded the track, the world was hardly paying attention. Written originally for R&B singer Patrice Rushen, who turned it down, Prince then waxed it himself for his self-titled second studio album, which despite cresting at No.22 Stateside, hardly had the impact of his later records. Chaka's cover is the definitive version, for sure, and features an all-star cast of contributors, including Stevie Wonder (on harmonica, natch), Melle Mel, of Grandmaster Flash And The Furious Five plus drummer Steve Ferrone.

LIKE A VIRGIN
MADONNA
(SIRE)

Boasting the bombastic combined talents of Chic's Nile Rodgers, Bernard Edwards, and Tony Thompson, here's the iconic song that would give Madonna her first Top 5 hit in the UK and her debut US chart-topper. Despite seeming made-to-order for the Material Girl, it wasn't actually written for her – Billy Steinberg and Tom Kelly didn't even compose it with a female singer in mind, but when the pair played their demo (with Kelly singing lead) to Warner A&R executive Michael Ostin, he decided the lyrics and groove were perfect for Madonna. The track would give the singer not only one of her signature numbers, but the title for her second album. Result.

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WENDY JAMES

WITH DARRIN CORBIN

"I'm pictured here with Wendy James at a promotional event for her most recent album, *The Shape Of History*, in Gosport on 31 October 2024. There's been a gap of around 35 years since I last met her. However, Wendy was just as sweet and friendly as she was in her Transvision Vamp days – you can see that from my beaming smile! She truly deserves more recognition for her solo work."

HAIRCUT ONE HUNDRED

WITH MIKE DEPAZ

"After 40 years, I finally got to meet the lads of Haircut One Hundred, who were supporting Howard Jones on his North American tour. They made a stop at The Parker Playhouse in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on 5 September. Nick, Graham and Les are always kind and happy to see the loyal fans they never knew they had in America."

JASON DONOVAN

WITH ADRIAN KEEBLE

"Here I am photographed with Jason Donovan after seeing his gig at the Poole Lighthouse during his Doin' Fine 25 Tour on 21 February. He's such a charming person. This is the third time that I've met Jason. The show was phenomenal and luckily there is an Encore Tour next year."

JOANNE CATHERALL

WITH CHRIS HAILEY-NORRIS

"My husband and I attended Kylie Minogue's show at the Utilita Arena in Sheffield on 23 May. Jayson said to me, 'You won't believe who is in the row in front of us,' and sure enough, there was Joanne from The Human League. At the end of the concert, she walked towards us smiling, clearly seeing that we knew who she was. What a charming woman. She talked about what a great show it had been and what a fantastic pop star Kylie is. That was when we jumped in and said, 'Let's not forget about your good self!' What a pleasure it was to meet Joanne. She was generous with her time and more than happy to have some photos taken. Two divas in one night, and both utterly brilliant!"

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JAPAN
"IT'S AS IF WE DISCOVERED SOPHISTICATION, SUBTLETY AND NUANCE OVERNIGHT"
THE BAND ON THEIR QUIET LIFE REBIRTH

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY
JAPAN BIOGRAPHER AND MUSICIAN ANTHONY REYNOLDS LOOKS AT THE ORIGINS OF THE FIVE-PIECE'S SEMINAL THIRD ALBUM QUIET LIFE AND THE LATEST 2021 DELUXE REISSUE WITH REFLECTIONS FROM BAND MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATES

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NU SHOOZ POOLSIDE

WHEN *I CAN'T WAIT*'S UNFORGETTABLE ELECTRO-FUNK USHERED 1986'S *POOLSIDE*, NU SHOOZ'S THIRD ALBUM, INTO THE CHARTS, IT REVEALED THE PATIENCE OF AN OREGON COUPLE WHO WERE READY TO GO ALL THE WAY TO THE *POINT OF NO RETURN*

WYNDHAM WALLACE

While parents encourage children that, if they believe in themselves, they can be whatever they want, it's rarely true in reality. Just ask John Smith and Valerie Day, the husband and wife behind Oregon's colourful Nu Shooz. They'll surely concur that luck, often sizeable, is similarly vital to prosperity. After all, without a sequence of unlikely coincidences, not only would *I Can't Wait*, their dancefloor classic, never have existed – not to mention *Poolside*, its parent album – but nor indeed would the band.

Take the couple's first meeting. That day in 1975, Smith, only 19, was hitchhiking from Olympia to Los Angeles, having travelled the opposite direction 24 hours earlier for a date with a high school sweetheart. Their reunion was fruitless but, on his journey home, he encountered an occupant of The First Cosmic Bank of Divine Economy, a Portland hippie commune. An invitation was accepted to stop overnight, and there Smith ran into 16-year-old Day.

She'd moved in a year earlier, with the house owned by Diane Weigler, a former TV presenter who'd previously been Day's fifth grade instructor. In fact, Day was just one of 36 young people who, before its dissolution, would lodge in what had started as an alternative school. But though later she'd opt to become a teacher herself, and the collective so dazzled Smith that he elected to stay on, neither was impressed by their future partner. "She thought I looked dumb, and I thought she was 12," Smith told the Choons podcast in 2022. Fortunately, Day confessed: "The more I got to know him, the more interesting he became." Within a month, their wariness gave way to a shared love of music. They're still together today.

Their tastes were nonetheless different. Smith grew up with Herb Alpert and The Kingston Trio before LA station KGFJ 1230 – "The Sound of Black America" – cultivated his passion for soul and jazz. Day, who'd buried herself in multiple artistic pursuits after her family disintegrated, admired Joni Mitchell and Carole King. Common ground lay in John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra. Before long, Day was studying jazz at Portland State University while Smith was part of Calypso band Felicidades' line-up.

The group didn't last long, but Smith formed a new one with their singer, Larry Haggin. "The original concept…" he noted in 2022 on Nu Shooz' website, "was a mash-up of The Temptations and late-period Isley Brothers" with "four-part soul harmonies and psychedelic jazz guitar solos".

Still, having rejected one improbable identity, Hide The Silverware, the discovery of Illinois power pop band The Shoes led to another swift rebranding before they debuted as a quartet in June 1979. A name wasn't their only problem, either. As Smith confided in 2020 to website Rediscover The 80s: "We pretty much sucked".

> NU SHOOZ'S ACHIEVEMENTS WERE HARD-WON, THEIR FAME SHORT-LIVED, BUT THEIR GOOD FORTUNE WAS WELL-DESERVED

Haggin soon quit, so Smith cast around, adding four brass players (The Shoo-Horns), as well as backing singers (The i-lets, who included Day), with Nu Shooz gradually expanding until, at their apex, they numbered over a dozen. Performances in the rash of clubs then opening in Portland landed them a Ladies Night residency at The Last Hurrah, where their songs, alongside a mix of choice covers, made them the toast of the city.

By August, 1981, they were, according to *The Oregonian*, "the fastest growing pop band in the area." This commendation would prove premature. A year later, down to nine members, torn between New Wave and funk, they set out on a lengthy tour. They returned to discover they'd lost their residency, and even 1982's *Can't Turn It Off*, a solid debut album on local label Nebula Circle, barely kept them in business.

Half the group left, and while Day took up lead vocals, Smith was reduced to banging out new songs on a four-track. Luckily, one of the first was *I Can't Wait*.

Constructed, Smith revealed, again on their website, "by the furnace in the basement with a nylon string guitar," the lyrics followed in the kitchen 15 minutes before its first rehearsal. Such details would have stunned Jimmy Jam (of Jam and Lewis) who, Smith claims, later told him at the Minneapolis Music Awards: "We wish we had written that song."

In truth, the version he'd recognise took a while longer, shaped by a series of fortunate events. For starters, months after the original sessions, Smith stumbled on The Time's *Jungle Love* and 'borrowed' its percussive bottle sound. The outcome was subsequently included on their self-released second album, 1985's *Tha's Right*, and reviewed by a local writer, who bemoaned *I Can't Wait*'s absence on the airwaves. Local station KKRZ then accepted this challenge, but if their audience immediately demanded heavy rotation, luck abandoned Nu Shooz once more, with an ensuing demo deal with Warners leading to nothing.

Luck *was*, all the same, around the corner, reemerging after the band licensed the song to *Hot Tracks*, an international DJ service. This subscription-only compilation made it to Holland, where, at the invitation of Injection Records – and without Nu Shooz' knowledge – a producer, Peter Slaghuis, reworked the tune, adding a synth melody Smith still calls "the barking seal". Resurfacing in New York as the *Long Vocal Dutch Remix*, it became a club hit, after which, as Smith recalled cheerfully a year later for *Creem*, "a delivery boy at Atlantic Records – he's since been given an office – mentioned it to them." The label signed Nu Shooz in January 1986.

A month later, Slaghuis' take was officially released, peaking in June at No.3 in the United States. In the UK, it went one place higher, lingering on the charts for 14 weeks. Meanwhile, an enigmatic video – directed by Jim Blashfield – helped make it a worldwide hit. Now all they needed was an album.

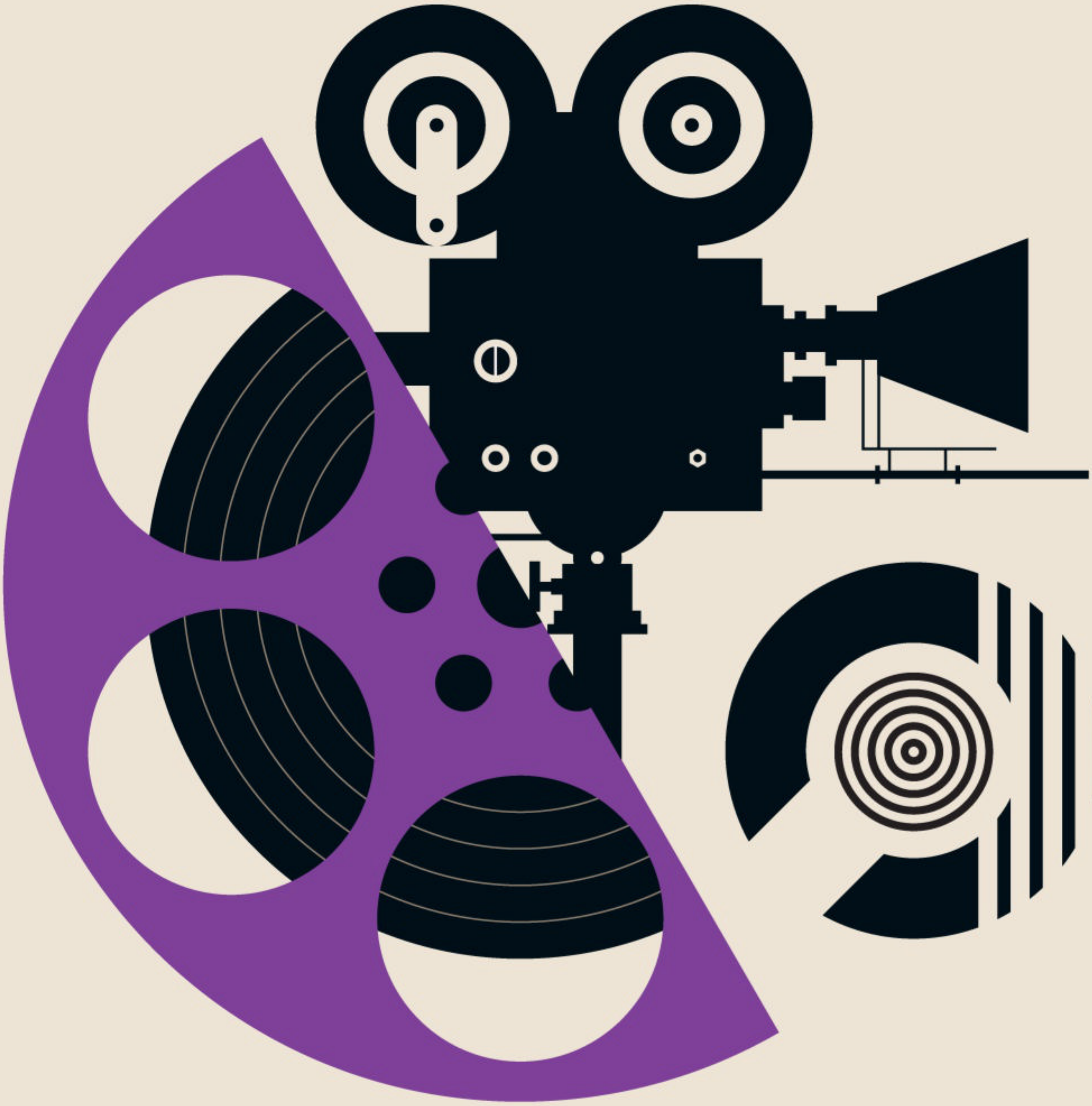
Happily, they had songs ready, and this time fate rewarded them with Shep Pettibone,

ATLANTIC
NU SHOOZ
POOLSIDE
81647-1
STEREO
ONE
NU SHOOZ
POOLSIDE

fresh from triumphs with Pet Shop Boys and Miami Sound Machine. Of the three tracks he mixed, *Point Of No Return* made it two songs in Billboard's Top 40 that summer, while the stuttering *Lost Your Number* provided a boisterous opener and the soulful disco of *Don't Let Me Be The One* a third, if less successful single. DJ Freddy Bastone also stepped up for *Goin' Thru The Motions* and brisk *Secret Message*, while future Atlantic A&R Director Timmy Regisford oversaw the chiming *You Put Me In A Trance* and the brassy *Don't You Be Afraid.*

That Jimmy Jam was a fan made perfect sense. *Poolside* was both cutting edge and commercial. Twenty years after *I Say A Little Prayer* had become Smith's first 7" purchase, Nu Shooz appeared on *Solid Gold* with host Dionne Warwick. By the end of 1986, moreover, the album had gone gold in the US.

Of course, their luck only lasted so long. 1988's follow-up *Told U So*, underperformed, and Atlantic didn't even tell them that they'd dropped their next album. But in 2015, Icona Pop and Questlove joined forces to cover *I Can't Wait*, a reminder of not only how vital Nu Shooz were but how influential they remain. Their achievements were hard-won, their fame short-lived, but their good fortune was well-deserved.

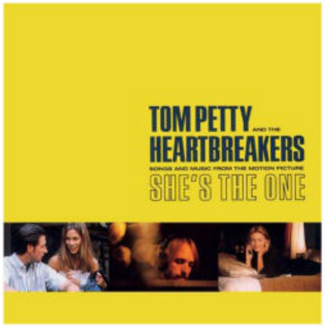


TOP 20
SINGLE-ARTIST SOUNDTRACKS

From sci-fi classics and dystopian dramas to rom-coms and thrillers, we explore the work of artists and bands who successfully rose to the challenge of soundtracking a movie or TV series

BARRY PAGE

Over the years, picking the right music for a movie or TV series has often proven to be as important as casting or directorial choices, and some multi-artist soundtracks are among the biggest-selling albums of all time. There have, however, been many instances in the realm of film and television in which trust has been placed in just one act to align their unique artistry with the visuals. Discounting albums that include tracks by other artists (which rules out *The Bodyguard*), and with a strict rule of one LP per act (apologies, Prince fans), here are 20 of our favourite single-artist movie and TV soundtracks.


TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS
SONGS AND MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE
SHE'S THE ONE

20

TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS

SHE'S THE ONE (1996)

The soundtrack for the romantic comedy *She's The One* was a hotchpotch of *Wildflowers* leftovers, covers and new songs, but it holds together surprisingly well – contrary to criticism such as *EW*'s remark: "Moms make their leftovers into casseroles, while record companies make theirs into soundtracks." Tom Petty himself wasn't exactly enthusiastic about the project, telling *Men's Journal*: "I only did it because I didn't have anything else to do."

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
HANNA
MUSIC COMPOSED BY
The chemical brothers

19

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

HANNA (2011)

Celebrated director Joe Wright was already well acquainted with The Chemical Brothers, having been part of a creative collective that married stunning visuals to the duo's dynamic electronics and block rockin' beats, and their award-winning score for the flashy action thriller *Hanna* played a big part in its success. "You can expect an extraordinarily loud, thumping, deeply funky score that will not disappoint," Wright enthused to *Film Star Rejects*. He's not wrong.

RESTLESS NATIVES & RARITIES
BIG COUNTRY

18

BIG COUNTRY

RESTLESS NATIVES (1985)

At the height of their popularity, Big Country were approached to score Michael Hoffman's *Restless Natives*, a comedic tale of two modern-day highwaymen. Infused with the Scots' signature twin-guitar sound, the music was spread across two 12" B-sides, and later collected on 1998's *Restless Natives & Rarities*. "I loved being involved with this," frontman Stuart Adamson wrote in the liner notes. "Writing music to add colour and mood to visual images is often the way I like to work on songs."

17

ENYA

ENYA (1986)

Former Clannad member Enya's big solo break arrived after cutting the soundtrack for the BBC's six-part cultural series, *The Celts: Rich Traditions And Ancient Myths*. Doubling up as her self-titled debut album, the singer's ethereal tones piqued the interest of WEA, and global success beckoned. Later reconfigured for the international market as *The Celts*, it spawned a minor hit in the title cut, but many readers will also recognise *Boadicea*, which The Fugees sampled for the chart-topper *Ready Or Not*.

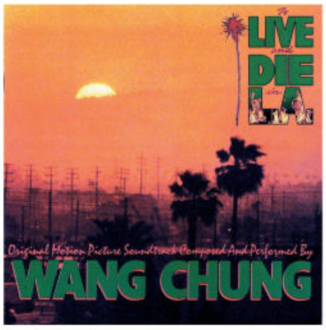
Jungle Fever
MUSIC FROM THE MOVIE
STEVIE WONDER

16

STEVIE WONDER

JUNGLE FEVER (1991)

Following a somewhat patchy decade in which hits such as *I Just Called To Say I Love You* were cruelly parodied, Motown legend Stevie Wonder restored some credibility with his OST for *Jungle Fever*, an acclaimed Spike Lee drama that addressed crack addiction and interracial relationships. Wonder reportedly read the script in braille and was sent scenes from the movie. "Stevie goes to the movies all the time," Lee told *Slate*. "He has someone, an assistant, whisper to him what the imagery is."


To LIVE and DIE in L.A.
Original Motion Picture Soundtrack Composed And Performed By
WANG CHUNG

15

WANG CHUNG

TO LIVE AND DIE IN L.A. (1985)

Best known in the UK for their 1984 hit *Dance Hall Days* (once earmarked for *Thriller*, no less), Wang Chung were practically household names in the US, where they went on to register huge success with *Let's Go!* and *Everybody Have Fun Tonight*. At William Friedkin's behest, Jack Hues and Nick Feldman wrote songs for the action flick *To Live And Die In L.A.* "This is not only an exciting film score, but a fine album of modern music," the director enthused in the LP's notes.

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
Disney
TRON
LEGACY
MUSIC BY DAFT PUNK

14

DAFT PUNK

TRON: LEGACY (2010)

Having enlisted the services of Wendy Carlos for the soundtrack of the original *Tron* movie in 1982, Disney felt a similarly visionary electronic act should score its long-awaited sequel, and hired Daft Punk, who had transitioned from home recording artists to contemporary EDM superstars. No half-hearted side project, the French duo invested two years in their Grammy-nominated score, painstakingly integrating their electronic motifs within an orchestral framework to complement the stunning visuals.

Tennant/Lowe
Battleship Potemkin
Performed by Pet Shop Boys
and Dresdner Sinfoniker
conducted by
Jonathan Stockhammer
Orchestrations by Torsten Rasch

13

PET SHOP BOYS

BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (2005)

Whilst not a novel concept in pop music, since Giorgio Moroder had previously overseen a restoration of silent movie classic *Metropolis* and compiled a contemporary soundtrack, Pet Shop Boys' score for *Battleship Potemkin* nevertheless saw them stepping well outside of their wheelhouse. But the challenge of creating a continuous piece of music was one they gleefully accepted, as it gave them the chance to experiment with an array of moods and tempos.

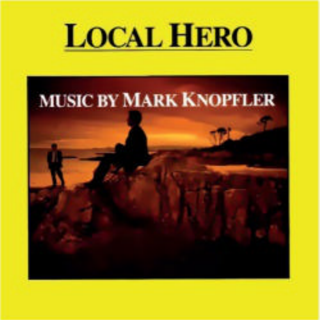
MADONNA
I'M BREATHLESS
MUSIC FROM AND INSPIRED BY THE FILM DICK TRACY

12

MADONNA

I'M BREATHLESS (1990)

Tie-in albums for *Dick Tracy* were plentiful in 1990, with a choice of a Danny Elfman score, a multi-artist OST, and a standalone LP from leading lady Madonna, who got to strike a pose as a showgirl on a mix of big band, swing and pop originals, three of which were penned by Broadway icon Stephen Sondheim. Flexing her vocal muscles on burlesque numbers (see *I'm Going Bananas* and cheeky hit *Hanky Panky*) as well as ballads (*Sooner Or Later*), the record was appended with chart-topper *Vogue*.


LOCAL HERO
MUSIC BY MARK KNOPFLER

11

MARK KNOPFLER

LOCAL HERO (1983)

Au courant producer of box office hits like *Midnight Express* and *Chariots Of Fire*, David Puttnam knew the value of a good score and invited Mark Knopfler to soundtrack director Bill Forsyth's follow-up to *Gregory's Girl*. The Dire Straits frontman's inaugural OST earned a BAFTA, while *Going Home*'s beguiling melody has endured as a football anthem at Newcastle's St James' Park. In aid of cancer charities, the track was also recently rerecorded by a jaw-dropping ensemble of musicians.

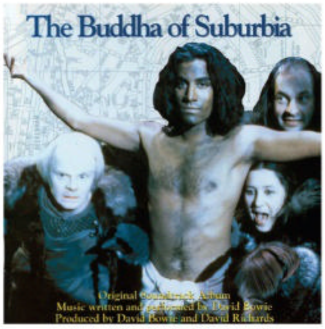
AIR
The Virgin Suicides

10

AIR

THE VIRGIN SUICIDES (2000)

Conscious of being pigeonholed as retro-futurists following the global success of *Moon Safari*, Air's acclaimed score for director Sofia Coppola's debut saw the French duo abandon their signature lounge-pop sound and pursue a darker sonic path. "The real spirit of the soundtrack," Jean-Benoît Dunckel later told *Dazed*, "is this fascination with death and the fascination with having your spirit floating when you die and how you may suddenly feel free and liberated."


The Buddha of Suburbia
Original Soundtrack Album
Music written and performed by David Bowie
Produced by David Bowie and David Richards

09

DAVID BOWIE

THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA (1993)

The follow-up to his career-boosting *Black Tie White Noise* album found David Bowie in a nostalgic mood, drawing on "dozens of personal 70s memories" for a record sparked by a request from novelist Hanif Kureishi to score the BBC's adaptation of *The Buddha Of Suburbia*. Comprising an array of ambient, electronic, jazz and rock sounds, only the title cut made it to the four-part series, but the low-key LP has quietly grown in stature as one of Bowie's most inventive releases.

MUSIC FROM THE ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence
MUSIC COMPOSED & PERFORMED BY RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

08

RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

MERRY CHRISTMAS, MR LAWRENCE (1983)

Ryuichi Sakamoto was a surprise choice to play a Japanese war camp commandant opposite David Bowie in the 1983 drama *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, but director Nagisa Ōshima not only had faith in the rookie actor, he gave him full creative control of the BAFTA-winning score. In a case of gentlemen prefer celluloid, Sakamoto also collaborated with David Sylvian on the hit single *Forbidden Colours*, a vocal version of the titular theme song.

BIRDY
Music from the Film by
peter gabriel

07

PETER GABRIEL

BIRDY (1985)

At the age of 17, soundtrack enthusiast Peter Gabriel chose a career in rock music over a place at film school, but years later seized the opportunity to spread his sonic wings with the score for *Birdy*, Alan Parker's movie centred on two Vietnam War veterans and their PTSD struggles. While not wholly original, since some motifs from his solo back catalogue were repurposed, Gabriel was able to capture the vets' emotional trauma via an array of ambient and tribal textures, which would signpost his immediate musical future.

EURYTHMICS
1984

06

EURYTHMICS

1984 (FOR THE LOVE OF BIG BROTHER) (1984)

Eurythmics' chilling electronic soundtrack for the film adaptation of George Orwell's dystopian classic incensed the director, Michael Radford, who preferred a more traditional orchestral score by Dominic Muldowney. Previewed by the stuttering hit *Sexcrime (Nineteen Eighty-Four)*, the duo's contentious LP proved to be one of their most creatively satisfying. The sample-heavy album, explained Dave Stewart, was shaped by Kraftwerk, tribal beats and Booker T. & The M.G.'s.

Music From The Original Motion Picture Soundtrack
Composed and Produced by Giorgio Moroder
Midnight Express

05

GIORGIO MORODER

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (1978)

The undisputed king of multi-artist OSTs in the 80s, Giorgio Moroder initially made his name as a film music composer with the soundtrack for prison drama *Midnight Express*. Featuring the hypnotic instrumental *The Chase*, it won the original score Oscar, fending off stiff competition from Jerry Goldsmith, Ennio Morricone and John Williams. "Movie music composers all came from classical backgrounds back then," he told The Talks. "It was a big thing for a pop composer to enter this world."

FROM THE MOTION PICTURE...
ABOUT A BOY
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK COMPOSED & PERFORMED
BY BADLY DRAWN BOY

04

BADLY DRAWN BOY

ABOUT A BOY (2002)

Damon Gough attracted a host of admirers for his Mercury Music Prize-winning album *The Hour Of The Bewilderbeast*, including author Nick Hornby, who felt the multi-instrumentalist would be a tea cosy fit for the soundtrack of the celluloid adaptation of *About A Boy*. Gough's indie folk soundtrack certainly matched the script for emotional depth, with Hornby himself finding some of the lyrics profoundly moving, writing in *31 Songs* that *A Minor Incident* meant, "something much more personal to me than my book ever did."

FLASH GORDON
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK MUSIC BY QUEEN

03

QUEEN

FLASH GORDON (1980)

After famously declaring 'no synthesizers!' in the credits of a string of hit albums in the 70s, Queen decided they needed to move with the times, and experimented with an array of new toys on 1980 album *The Game* and their innovative soundtrack for cult sci-fi classic *Flash Gordon*, which cleverly wove in oft-quoted dialogue to give it a sense of narrative. Matching the movie for vibrancy and bombast, the album attracted numerous plaudits, while their memorable theme song for the titular hero hit the UK Top 10.

CLANNAD "LEGEND"

02

CLANNAD

LEGEND (1984)

Eschewing the traditional image of a green-stockinged Robin Hood "riding through the glen", Richard Carpenter's definitive rendering of the legendary outlaw's story via hit television series *Robin Of Sherwood* was instead steeped more in pagan myth than pastiche. Irish band Clannad ostensibly upset folk purists with their soundtrack, which blended traditional instruments with synths to complement the action, but it earned the family collective a BAFTA. The album was later expanded with 11 previously unreleased tracks.

01

PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION

PURPLE RAIN (1984)

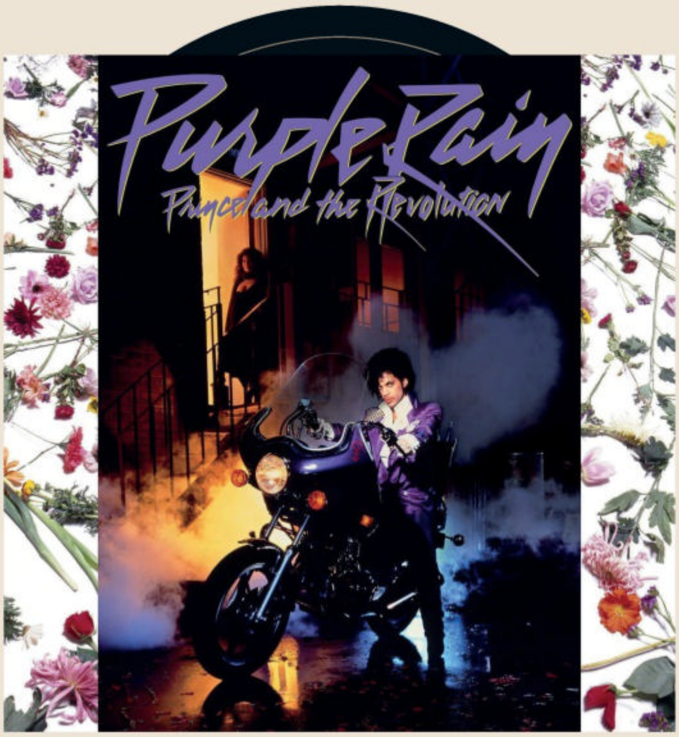
While there is certainly a case to be made for *Parade* and *Batman*, we can only include one Prince record here – and there was only going to be one winner. It's the singer's magnum opus, the career-defining album in which all the stars in the purple firmament aligned, the one that made him a global superstar.

A classic standalone long-player by anyone's standards, it also served as the soundtrack for the singer's first motion picture, a box office smash that easily recouped its reported $7 million outlay. While he'd already put himself in the MTV shop window with hits *1999* and *Little Red Corvette*, this was nothing compared to the exposure he'd receive with *Purple Rain*.

Loosely autobiographical, Prince plays aspiring star The Kid, who distracts himself from his broken home as the singer of The Revolution, but is soon faced with other problems, both within the band and his love life.

In recent years, the movie has attracted criticism for its misogynistic depiction of women who are tricked into stripping, abused by their partners, and, in one case, literally treated like trash.

By contrast, the soundtrack album was universally acclaimed and feted at award ceremonies, while its cloudburst of hit singles included two Billboard No.1s – *When Doves Cry* and *Let's Go Crazy* – plus, of course, the epic and anthemic title cut. ■



The singer's magnum opus, Purple Rain is a career-defining LP in which all the stars in the purple firmament aligned

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A
POPSCENE
YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE SUB-GENRES

FRENCH TOUCH

DEVISED IN THE 90s, OUR GALLIC FRIENDS MIXED HOUSE, DISCO AND VOCAL CHOPS FOR A TIMELESS, DANCEFLOOR-READY VIBE...

STEVE O'BRIEN

WHAT IS IT?

French Touch, French House, Filter House, call it what you will, was a genre that brought a distinct Gallic tang to the charts in the mid-90s and early 2000s. Characterised by filter and phaser effects, this Ibiza-friendly sound came across as house's more sophisticated cousin, blending chopped-up vocal samples with the funky grooves of 70s disco and the relentless four-on-the-floor thump of Chicago house.

Like so many musical terms, the genre's name was critic-birthed, this time by Martin James in his *Melody Maker* write-up of Étienne de Crécy's 1996 album *Super Discount*. Daft Punk would become the sound's poster boys, of course, but the scene was broader, with labels like Roulé and Crydamoure showcasing acts that raided old records for hooks, creating a sound that was both nostalgic and futuristic. By the late 90s, French Touch had crossed over big time – Stardust's *Music Sounds Better With You* was inescapable, Air added a dreamy lounge twist, while Cassius brought the funk. Its heyday fizzled out in the mid-Noughties as electroclash and bloghouse took over, but French Touch left an indelible mark on dance music, influencing everyone from Calvin Harris to The Weeknd. Daft Punk's 2021 split was a sad coda, but with Justice still a go-to band for high profile collabs (Miguel and Tame Impala guested on the duo's last LP) and compilations still dropping, this genre's *joie de vivre* endures.

WHAT THEY SAY

"French Touch created a bridge between house and disco; Ed Banger then allowed a crossover between house and rock. The French Touch scene was tiny; everybody knew each other."

LABEL BOSS FÉLIX DE GIVRY, QUOTED IN *VICE*

"The whole French house was my sound when I started: Cassius, Motorbass, Super Discount. They had such a run, the French. It was a hip-hop feeling, because they sampled old soul stuff, but then they [sped] it up, they degraded it to be a bit dirty and raw, they had this euphoria in it. House music wasn't that euphoric before. It was funky. I loved it."

DJ KOZE, QUOTED ON THE PITCHFORK WEBSITE

ESSENTIAL ARTISTS

▲ AIR

Formed in Versailles in 1995 by Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel, Air were the dreamier, more cinematic side of French Touch, blending house with trip-hop and lounge for a soundtrack to moonlit drives. Their 1998 debut album *Moon Safari* (UK No.6) was a sensation, with the singles *Sexy Boy* and *All I Need* showcasing breathy vocals over swirling synths. In 2000, they composed the score for Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* movie, cementing their reputation for ethereal vibes. Later albums such as 2001's *10 000 Hz Legend* leaned more towards pop, but they've kept evolving.

▲ CASSIUS

Philippe Cerboneschi (better known as Zdar) and Hubert Blanc-Francard (Boombass) met via Motorbass in the early 90s before launching Cassius in '96. Their 1999 LP, simply titled *1999*, peaked at No. 28 in the UK, and *Feeling For You* was a club staple. The pair then collaborated with Pharrell Williams on 2006's *15 Again* and Beastie Boys' Mike D on 2016's *Ibifornia*, but tragedy struck in 2019 when Zdar died in a fall, just two days before the release of the duo's fifth album, *Dreems*. Boombass later published a memoir, *Une Histoire De La French Touch*, in 2021.

▲ JUSTICE

Arriving to the French Touch party towards the end of its commercial peak (they formed in 2003), Gaspard Augé and Xavier de Rosnay's 2007 debut *Cross* was a beast – No.11 in France, UK Dance No.1 – with *D.A.N.C.E.* and *Stress* bringing gritty electro flavours to the genre, all distorted guitars and massive drops. Follow-up LPs *Audio, Video, Disco* (2011) and *Woman* (2016) reached No.5 and No.17 respectively in their homeland and last year the duo released fourth album *Hyperdrama*, hailed by the *NME* as "Flashy, over the top and keen to make a spectacle."

◄ DAFT PUNK

French Touch's most enigmatic pairing, Daft Punk were Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo who'd first come together as part of the rock outfit Darlin' in the early 90s. They pivoted to electronica shortly after, picking their name from a comment made in a review of Darlin' in – here we go again – *Melody Maker* ("daft punky thrash" was how the paper described them). Their 1997 album *Homework* exploded globally, peaking at No.8 in the UK and shifting millions, thanks to hits like *Around The World*. They followed it with the even bigger *Discovery* in 2001 (UK No.2), spawning *One More Time*. Grammy wins piled up for 2013's fourth studio album, *Random Access Memories*, when *Get Lucky* was everywhere. Sadly, it was to be their last album, and after several years of silence, their split was announced in 2021.

ESSENTIAL ALBUMS

ÉTIENNE DE CRÉCY
SUPER DISCOUNT (1996)

The album that birthed the French Touch name, this compilation-styled debut (the credits list several artists, though they're all aliases for de Crécy) fused deep house and filter effects with loungey vibes. Tracks like *Le Patron Est Devenu Fou!* raided 70s dancefloor hits for hooks to create its nostalgic-futuristic sound. It peaked modestly, but set the template.

DAFT PUNK
HOMEWORK (1997)

Daft Punk's debut, recorded at the band's Daft House studio in Paris, was a 16-track monster that has, in the nearly three decades since its release, sold more than two million copies worldwide. From the squelchy *Da Funk* to the hypnotic *Around The World*, it's a masterclass in disco sampling and layered house beats.

AIR MOON SAFARI (1998)

Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel's 1998 debut was French Touch at its most seductive, blending filtered house with lush orchestral swells and – on *All I Need* – Beth Hirsch's hazy vocals. Three singles were released from the album, and all made the UK Top 30. But it wasn't just about chart success; this was, it felt like, *the* sound of 1998.

DAFT PUNK DISCOVERY (2001)

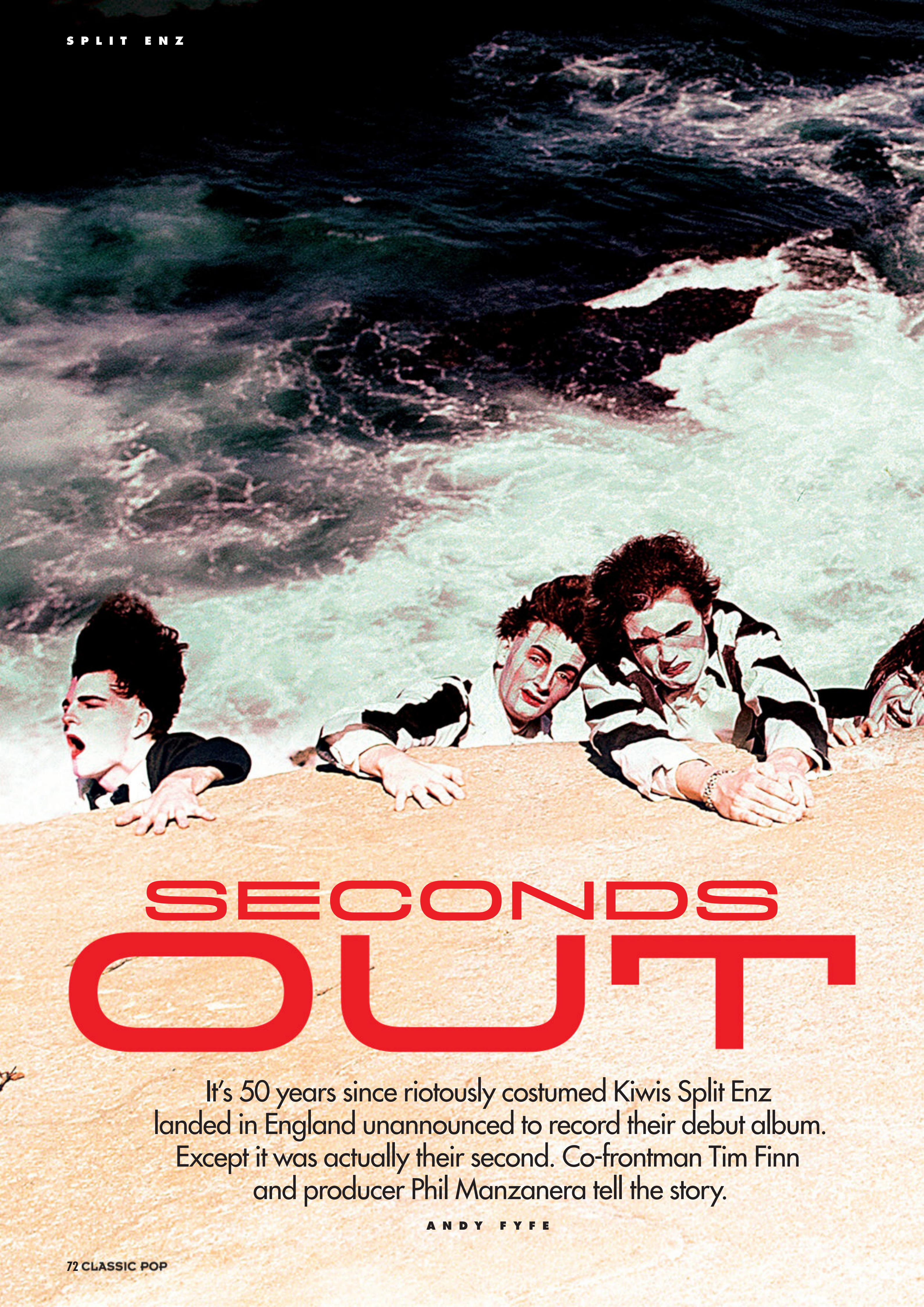
Granted, we already have *Homework* on our list, but it would be remiss to name French Touch's must-have albums without mentioning its poppier sequel. Hitting No.2 in the UK and France, this commercial behemoth amped up the samples and Auto-Tune for tracks like *One More Time* and *Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger.*

ESSENTIAL SONGS

- Together – *So Much Love To Give*
- Stardust – *Music Sounds Better With You*
- Cassius – *Cassius 1999*
- Air – *Sexy Boy*
- Daft Punk – *One More Time*
- Justice – *D.A.N.C.E.*

FURTHER READING

French Connections: From Discotheque To Daft Punk – The Birth Of French Touch
by James Martin
(Velocity Press) ■



SECONDS OUT

It's 50 years since riotously costumed Kiwis Split Enz landed in England unannounced to record their debut album. Except it was actually their second. Co-frontman Tim Finn and producer Phil Manzanera tell the story.

ANDY FYFE

***Enzyclopedia Volumes One & Two*, Split Enz's new early-years boxset, includes insights from the band as well as producer Phil Manzanera (pictured below)**

© Peter Hill-Travis

As the wild-haired, bug-eyed glasses wearing guitarist for Roxy Music, Phil Manzanera was no stranger to the more theatrical side of the pop spectrum in 1975. Even for him, however, encountering New Zealand art rockers Split Enz for the first time was a startling experience.

Roxy Music had flown from London to Sydney to start their first ever Australian tour, promoting their recent *Country Life* album. They had few reference points of what to expect in Australia. At the time, the country was known for a brash "she'll be right" attitude towards culture: more beer than Byron, more "sheilas" than sophistication.

"Australia was bloody miles away," Manzanera says, sitting in the sunny music room of his house. "It took forever to get there. We arrived in Sydney, had no idea what to expect except the back of beyond. I got to the hotel after 28 hours or something, flop on the bed, turn on the telly, and there's Split Enz. What the fuck!?"

Manzanera was captivated. Whatever concept he had of Australian (sic) bands involved long hair, T-shirts and loud, heads-down no-nonsense rocking. Instead, Split Enz were a riot of strange, brightly coloured suits, wild hairdos and exaggerated, theatrical makeup.

The band were also on the cusp of releasing their debut album, *Mental Notes*, which is about to be re-released as a 50th anniversary 5CD or 3LP boxset.

"I just thought, 'Who the fuck were these guys?'" Manzanera laughs, still baffled by his first sight of a band he would soon help introduce to the wider world. "They were absolutely incredible. Then next day we discovered at the gig that they were our support act."

UNSTABLE CHEMISTRY

Split Enz existed for only 12 years, but in that time the band burned through 16 members.

"It was very unstable at times," Tim Finn admits, "but in some ways those instabilities spurred us on. We were quite insular, but we always thought everyone in the group was just marvellous."

Some members, such as drummer Div Vercoe and flute player Mike Howard, only stayed around for a matter of months, while others such as co-founder Phil Judd rejoined several times. At the point the band finally called it quits in 1984, no original members remained.

Among the shorter-serving members, violinist with the original 1972 line-up Miles Golding went on to join the Royal Philharmonic and BBC Symphony orchestras, and brothers Geoff and Mike Chunn went on to found Citizen Band, one of New Zealand's biggest-selling groups in the late 70s.

Judd, meanwhile, eventually formed The Swingers, who scored 1981's biggest selling No.1 single in both Australia and New Zealand with *Counting The Beat.*

Tim Finn left in 1984. The year before he'd released a successful solo album, *Escapade*, and following Split Enz's 1983 album *Conflicting Emotions* he departed to concentrate on his solo career.

Which left his younger brother Neil Finn in charge of the band. It was a role Neil never felt comfortable with as he always saw Split Enz as Tim and Phil Judd's band, but neither were members now. After a final album, 1984's *See Ya 'Round*, Neil disbanded Split Enz and eventually formed Crowded House, which featured not just Split Enz's final drummer Paul Hester, but long-serving keyboard player Eddie Rayner as an unofficial fourth member.

"WE KNEW WHAT WE WERE DOING SEEMED VERY CONFRONTATIONAL TO A LOT OF PEOPLE... WE WANTED TO SHAKE IT UP."

TIM FINN

Watching from the side of the stage as Split Enz performed their unique blend of art rock and music hall pop, Manzanera also marvelled at the music.

"They are amazing. How did this happen in Australia? Walking back to my dressing room, I put my head in and said, 'You guys are so good. Anything I can do to help...' One head popped out and said, 'Will you produce our album?' How arrogant was I, but how cheeky were they?"

Manzanera agreed, expecting nothing to come of the offer. Split Enz were in Australia, he was in England, the possibility of producing an album from the other side of the world still decades away. Less than a year later Split Enz arrived in London, just as cheekily confident as they'd been that night in Sydney. And it was the start of not just reinventing their career, but a lifelong friendship between Manzanera and Split Enz co-founder, co-lead singer and co-main songwriter, Tim Finn.

"If someone from Roxy Music says, 'Come to England!' you pack your bags and bloody go to England," Finn says from his home in Auckland, New Zealand. "We didn't know he didn't expect us to actually turn up."

COLOURFUL CHARACTERS

There are moments when pop music changes a country's culture, when everything is suddenly different than it was four minutes earlier. In the US, it was The Beatles playing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, in the UK it was David Bowie on *Top Of The Pops* performing *Starman*.

In 1974, in farthest flung New Zealand, Split Enz helped turn a grey, deeply conservative country into something altogether more colourful with a single Saturday night TV variety appearance. Debuting their now-familiar, but then outrageously provocative, costumes and makeup, they gave a performance that had small-town dads choking on their dinners, while teenage kids sat agog at the strange otherness before them.

This wasn't supposed to happen in polite, petite, straight-as-a-die New Zealand, where art of any unconventional stripe was viewed with deep suspicion, ruled by a deeply interventionist government hellbent on extending the demur 1950s long into the 1970s. Colour TV had only just arrived earlier that year; records were eye-wateringly expensive thanks in part to a 40 per cent sales tax; anything "seditious" that might corrupt the nation's youth was banned or heavily restricted, among them *A Clockwork Orange*, *Naked Lunch*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and, bizarrely, a 1940s history of British trade unions. Local bands were either wholesome, family-friendly pop acts or lank-haired blues rockers playing covers in pubs.

Split Enz were an unusually arty proposition in the conservative New Zealand of the mid-70s

And then there was Split Enz. Formed as Split Ends in 1972 by university friends Tim Finn and Phil Judd, the original drummerless folksy line-up included both flute and fiddle. Gradually both members and sound changed into the line-up that in 1973 appeared on NZ TV talent show *New Faces*, where they were described by one judge as being "too clever". Like the majority of Kiwis, the judges preferred their entertainment with meat and potatoes.

"We were definitely anti the cultural climate, and knew what we were doing seemed very confrontational to a lot of people," Finn says. "We wanted to shake it up."

The costumes were the idea of recently arrived percussionist and sculpture student Noel Crombie. Crombie often made his own clothes and would parade his wild inventions along Auckland's main commercial centre of a Friday evening, when shops were allowed to stay open until 9pm. "This was in 1971," says Finn, "We first started university in Auckland and Noel would go downtown dressed in his own clothes. It wasn't to shock people, he enjoyed wearing them, but they were very flamboyant, very out there."

Crombie arrived at the studio before that 1974 TV appearance toting a mysterious vintage suitcase. "I can still see that suitcase," continues Finn. "We had no idea what was about to happen, but he opened it and there they were, black and white costumes that he'd hand sewn. They were pretty crudely made, distortions of men's suits, which he just ripped apart and asymmetrised.

"He'd made the decision we were going to wear costumes, and we loved it. It fitted the music and seemed to reflect how we were trying to rip song structure apart."

In 1975, the band moved to Sydney – still colonially conservative, but far more open-minded than provincial New Zealand. "We were put on really inappropriate bills with hard rock bands, had cans and bottles thrown at us," recalls Finn, "but eventually Michael Gudinski saw us and told us to move to Melbourne."

© Peter Hill-Travis

Split Enz were the first band from New Zealand to achieve major success beyond the Southern Hemisphere

MAGIC MUSHROOM

Gudinski wasn't just another guy in the audience. He was the founder of hugely successful Melbourne label Mushroom Records, home of the biggest band in Australia, Skyhooks. The move suited Split Enz, who could suddenly pull a crowd three nights a week anywhere in the city. Now signed to Mushroom, they returned to Sydney to record their debut album, *Mental Notes*. It wasn't the best experience.

According to then-bassist Mike Chunn, who would leave the band in 1977, they weren't taken seriously by the studio staff. Which made Manzanera's invite even more enticing: England was, after all, always the band's ultimate destination. With the backing of Gudinski, who supplied them with a flat in Chelsea, Split Enz set about establishing themselves in London, eventually securing a deal with Chrysalis for the UK and US and, after rehearsals, went into the famed Basing Street Studios (formerly Island Studios) in Notting Hill, to record their second LP, *Second Thoughts*. Except it was also their first, *Mental Notes*… Confused yet?

"It was typical of us to re-record bits of the first album, we never did very much that was straightforward," reveals Finn.

The original version of *Mental Notes* had only been released in Australia and New Zealand, where it charted at No.35 and No.7 respectively.

Always unsatisfied with the experience surrounding the sessions, the band decided to re-record four of the tracks from the original album, plus another two from the same sessions that didn't make the cut.

"We thought we could do it better," Finn says. "It was an odd thing to do, really, because we had plenty of other songs. Too many, in some ways."

Manzanera, however, was oblivious as to which songs were which. "I never listened to the first album because they never sent me a copy and hadn't even brought one over with them, so I was oblivious, really, and came to it totally fresh.

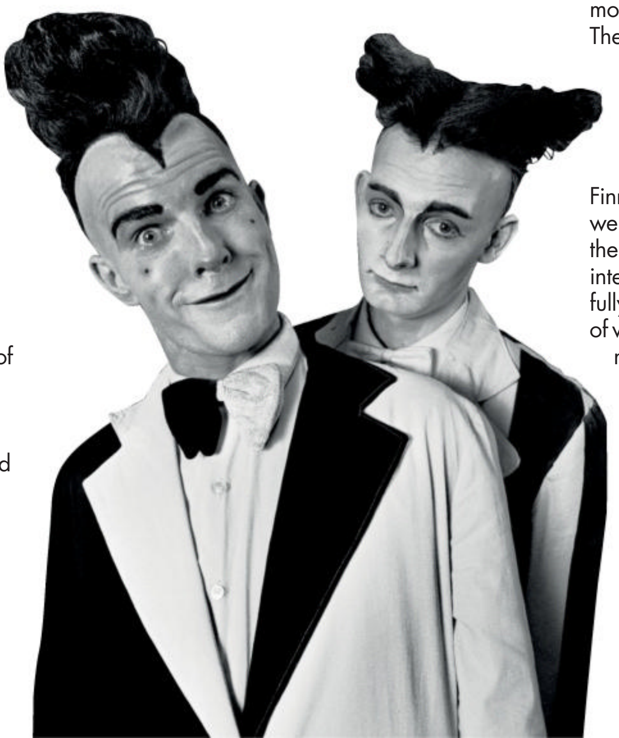
"It was very much about listening to the music that was there and getting on with whatever's in front of you."

One thing that did surprise the producer was just how accomplished the band were. "It was so easy to get performances out of them, they were so trained up, knew exactly what they were doing. I'd usually just say, 'Let's do another one', and boom, it was over, move on to the next song."

Christened *Mental Notes* everywhere except in New Zealand and Australia, where it was titled *Second Thoughts*, the album was released in the UK in August 1976, just as punk was reaching tabloid-outrage levels. While some of the longer tracks on *Mental Notes* had more in common with early Genesis than The Damned's debut single *New Rose*, released just a month later, there was more kinship between the Kiwi group and punk than may seem obvious.

"Punk wasn't really about the music, and we were outsiders, too," Finn explains. "Pete Shelley and XTC were really great songwriters. We saw the Sex Pistols and they just weren't that interesting to us. I guess what we didn't fully understand was the feeding ground of where it was coming from, whether or not those early punk bands were actually working class or actually oppressed. But if it genuinely was working class people uprising, flipping the bird to everything, then that was fine. That was good."

Mental Notes unfortunately was an album out of time. Today it sounds like a remarkable piece of art rock, but even Split Enz were moving on.



Tim Finn and Noel Crombie posing for a portrait in Amsterdam, circa 1976

Split Enz had to wait until 1980 for their first UK hit, when *I Got You* reached No.12

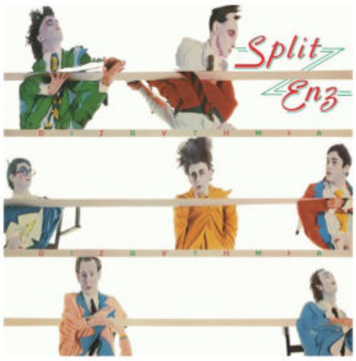
"We were finished with exploring elongated song structures," says Finn. "One song, *Nightmare Stamped*, was 16 minutes long, with only one section repeating near the end. We were exhausted by that form."

FINAL CHAPTERS

Follow-up album *Dizrythmia* was a hit back home, but in the UK the music press had pivoted to punk, leaving Split Enz with no coverage. Chrysalis dropped them, they had no manager, no agent, half the band were on the dole, and in one last attempt, they blagged some time at Startling Studios – housed in John Lennon's old Tittenhurst Park home – and came up with the 3:15 blast of New Wave fury, *I See Red*.

By now, several members had left, including co-founder Phil Judd, whose departure rocked Finn. "Phil and I started the band. The fact that he left three times and rejoined twice, it wrecked my psyche because we were like twin souls. I looked up to him so much as an artist and a writer. That was very destabilising."

Judd's replacement was Tim's 18-year-old brother Neil, later of Crowded House. "When Neil arrived," recalls Manzanera, "he'd only ever played acoustic guitar, so they sent him to me for electric lessons. It seems crazy now because he's such a brilliant guitarist."



Eventually, Neil's Split Enz songwriting debut – *I Got You* – became the band's first international hit, reaching No.12 in the UK and, says Tim, saving the band from extinction when its 1980 mother album *True Colours* sold all round the world.

"In 1979, we didn't know *True Colours* was around the corner. We didn't quite accept it was the end, but it very nearly was, which is actually a very good place to be just before you make a very successful record."

Fifty years on from *Mental Notes*, Split Enz are lauded as New Zealand's first successful international band, and their reunion next year for a one-off show has ignited huge interest, sparking whispers of possible UK dates. The interest is certainly a far cry from the time Tim Finn had to convince his father that rock'n'roll was his future.

"I remember around 1974 making a speech to my Dad because he said to me, 'Don't you think it's about time you got, like, a proper job?' He got stuck into me about it. I can't remember the speech well – although I recall Neil listening – but it was about how we can be the best band in the world and I just believe in this so much. I'm still here 50 years later, and still never had a proper job, so it must have been a good speech." ■

Split Enz, featuring Tim and Neil Finn, pose for a group portrait in 2006

● Split Enz' *Enzyclopedia Volumes One & Two* is released via Chrysalis on 14 November and reviewed on page 94

A FLAWED DIAMOND

The path to the better-known version of *Mental Notes*, recorded with Phil Manzanera in London, and the new 50th anniversary *Enzyclopedia Volumes One & Two* boxset is more than a little convoluted.

The original 1975 version of *Mental Notes*, recorded in Sydney, was only released in New Zealand and Australia, where it went gold. At the time, according to Tim Finn, the band were quite disappointed. "We did our best, but by the time we got in the studio to make *Mental Notes*, we were nervous wrecks because we thought, 'How are we going to do it?' We didn't have a George Martin sitting in there with us or the latest nerdy BBC technology to play with. The flaws of that record are a part of what I think makes it quite beautiful in a way as the years go by."

Four of the original LP's tracks – *Walking Down A Road*, *Titus*, *Stranger Than Fiction* and *Time For A Change* – were re-recorded once the band got into the studio with Phil Manzanera.

The differences are huge, sounding bigger and more aggressive than the original release – a dynamic taken even further on the boxset edition of the second album, remixed by Eddie Rayner, then the band's keyboard player and, more recently, a successful producer.

When Rayner went back to the digitised original tapes, he surprised even himself.

"Phil nailed it the first time around," Rayner explained, "but hearing the raw tracks again, I was struck by how inventive and fearless the arrangements were – and how good the band actually was.

"It was all far more refined and accomplished than I remembered. Even Noel's colourful percussion, which had been tucked away in the original mix, got a proper moment this time around."

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RATINGS

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ VERY GOOD
★★★ GOOD
★★ PATCHY
★ POOR

Kate Bush's *Best Of The Other Sides* is reviewed on page 90

THE HOT LIST

NEW RELEASES THAT NEED TO BE ON YOUR CULTURAL RADAR

STEVE HARNELL

BON JOVI
FOREVER

© Anton Corbijn

1

❶ FOREVER BON JOVI

New Jersey's blue collar rock legends have authored their first autobiography via Genesis Publications. Featuring personal insights from Bon Jovi's members, *Forever* also includes a treasure trove of memorabilia and handwritten lyrics as well as photographs from the band's private collections. Jon Bon Jovi shares the stories behind the artefacts, too, shedding light on the band's songwriting process, the making of their albums, plus key performances that cemented their place in rock history.

SIMPLY RED
40
RECOLLECTIONS

2

❷ RECOLLECTIONS

SIMPLY RED

Mick Hucknall is marking Simply Red's ruby anniversary by re-recording 40 of the band's best-loved songs. Produced by regular collaborator Andy Wright and available as a 4LP or 3CD set as well as a cut-down 20-track double vinyl variant, *Recollections* features hits including *Money's Too Tight (To Mention)*, *Holding Back The Years*, *Stars*, *Fairground* and *Something Got Me Started*. The album can be pre-ordered from simplyred.com and will be released on 21 November.

The Coral
mono
SIDE A • CHRISTMAS ON CORAL ISLAND
SHE DIED ON CHRISTMAS DAY • SIDE B

3

❸ CHRISTMAS ON CORAL ISLAND/ SHE DIED ON CHRISTMAS DAY

THE CORAL

The Scouse band have announced a festive single, out on 1 December. It features *Christmas On Coral Island* paired with *She Died On Christmas Day*, the latter a nod to Joe Meek's 'death discs,' which the fivepiece describe as "the sound of where we grew up: New Brighton and the fair, the lost piers, the thrill and danger of towns at the end of existence."

OUTSIDER ART
THE OTHER BEST OF
THE BLUE AEROPLANES
1985 - 2025

4

❹ OUTSIDER ART: THE OTHER BEST OF THE BLUE AEROPLANES 1985-2025

THE BLUE AEROPLANES

Bristolian cult heroes The Blue Aeroplanes have unveiled a companion piece to their career-spanning retrospective, *Magical Realism*, released back in January. Marking the band's 40th anniversary, *Outsider Art: The Other Best Of The Blue Aeroplanes 1985-2025* covers four decades of deep cuts, fan favourites, live staples, as well as previously unreleased material from the archives. Out via Chrysalis Records, the compilation is available on CD or a 2LP set with a bonus 7". Both formats feature new sleevenotes, rare photos and lyric sheets.

PET SHOP BOYS
DISCO 5

PARLOPHONE

★★★★☆

ROUNDING UP THEIR 18 YEARS OF REMIXING FOR OTHERS SINCE *DISCO 4*'S PREVIOUS INSTALMENT SHOWS PSB STILL THOROUGHLY ENJOY LETTING OFF STEAM AWAY FROM THE DAY JOB

© Eva Pentel

While it is disappointing that Pet Shop Boys haven't followed through with Chris Lowe's idea in *Classic Pop* that their fifth *Disco* remix compilation should have the Germanic title *Disco Fünf*, these 12 reworkings since volume 4 in 2007 highlight how they remain a byword for a quality polish.

PET SHOP BOYS / DISCO 5

Loosely speaking, Tennant/Lowe appear to enjoy either going underground or continuing to introduce proper pop to the type of musicians they had in mind while duffing up U2's *Where The Streets Have No Name*: hi to Paul Weller, Noel Gallagher and Primal Scream.

Weller's 12-minute *Cosmic Fringes* should be the most extreme remix here, his vocals at their gruffest offset by what initially seems to be Madness-style comic hoopla, until it's past its halfway point and the intended cosmic dreaming starts to take effect. Weller's claim that "I just exist" is more fragile thanks to the mania surrounding it.

As *Disco 5* is smartly sequenced throughout, Weller acts as an extended aperitif for the closing rework of Sleaford Mods' *West End Girls*. Jason Williamson makes Weller sound like Freddie Mercury, his bluntly delivered "Too many shadders" and "West End taahn" geezerisms excellently upended by the Pets acting as Williamson's Professor Higgins. PSB affectionately accompany the Sleafords' cover uptown, via a sleekly updated take on their original arrangement.

At the other extreme, the 12" of their 2022 Soft Cell duet, *Purple Zone*, appears like a heartfelt homage to a key influence. Everyone gets along famously, led by Marc Almond in full pop mould. Sadly, a similar longtime admiration can't save the one duff moment: a recent remix of Tina Turner's lost track, *Hot For You Baby,* which resembles the quack-quack-oops strained jollity that Pet Shop Boys satirised in *Absolutely Fabulous*.

The other 2025 remix exemplifies Neil and Chris' hidden fun: veteran LGBTQ+ Canadian indie staples The Hidden Cameras' *How Do You Love?* becoming slick, uptempo synth-pop. Equally, masked German producer Claptone's already frenetic *Queen Of Ice* is a magnificent meeting of minds which would have been No.1 for ages in 1987.

While Amy Winehouse biopic director Sam Taylor-Johnson's teasing 2008 cover of *I'm In Love With A German Film Star* is here, *Disco 5* omits two remixes from the same period, of MGMT's *Kids* and, frustratingly, a fab take on Lady Gaga's *Eh, Eh*.

At least *Disco 5* is a belated home for PSB's unremixed production of ex-Floy Joy singer Carroll Thompson's cover of Shannon's *Let The Music Play*, operatic disco right at home next to the melancholia of Wolfgang Tillmans' *Insanely Alive*. Not just a compilation, this works as a playlist in its own right. Wonder who's next for a remix? **John Earls**

CELESTE
WOMAN OF FACES

POLYDOR

★★☆☆☆

Having received the Brits' Rising Star award and a Mercury Prize nomination for her debut album *Not Your Muse* four years ago, Celeste's main ubiquity came from her single *Stop This Flame*'s use as Sky Sports' football theme in every ad break. The hit managed not to drive football fans insane because it's built on an infectious, uplifting riff.

Celeste also has one of modern pop's chief weapons in her favour: you can tell instantly when it's her singing. A distinctive yowl, elongating most notes at her disposal, means you're unlikely to mistake the Londoner for more interchangeable peers.

Quite how Celeste's second album is so pedestrian is thus puzzling. To be brutal, it's doubly mysterious there's so little raw emotion on show, considering it's apparently arisen from a tough break-up. Yet most of the album's eight ballads merely sound as if they're trying too hard to be Bond themes. Indeed, you might know the closing *This Is Who I Am* as the theme to Sky's entertaining *The Day Of The Jackal* remake.

Throughout, strings swell and pianos tinkle as Celeste appears like she's trying to convey heartache, while stopping considerably short of actually sounding fraught. Is she defiant instead? No, as the mood is too glum for anything so stirring.

Jeff Bhaskar's flat production, keeping both capable instrumentation and Celeste's trademark demolishing of consonants too tightly reined in, is partly at fault. Truth is, the songwriting doesn't allow Celeste to really let go.

There's one wonderful exception. *Could Be Machine* jolts the mood magnificently. It's not quite full-on dancefloor mayhem, yet is all the more unsettling for it. It soon builds from identikit pianos and woahs into dramatic drums and a percussive drop all the tenser for not allowing a full release.

It's disappointing Celeste hasn't sought more variety in her writing. Maybe she needed to exorcise these slowies first, but there aren't many different faces on show here. **JE**

NIGHTMARES ON WAX
ECHO45 SOUNDSYSTEM

WARP

★★★★☆

You don't get to hang around on Britain's most groundbreaking label without your music being future-proofed. George Evelyn is officially Warp's longest serving artist, and he's always adapted to survive, whether as the inventor of bleep with club bangers like 1989's *Dextrous* or as a consolidator of downtempo, via classics like *Les Nuits* a decade later.

For his 10th full-length album under the Nightmares On Wax name, Evelyn ropes in friends from across the years for a dubby mixtape that takes us back to where it all started in Leeds, when as a young man he was listening to pirate radio and discovering soundsystem culture for the first time.

Echo45 Soundsystem not only drops a series of bass-heavy tracks but also features celebrity idents from pals including Gilles Peterson, Daddy G, Colleen 'Cosmo' Murphy and Goldie, adding to a celebratory ebullience and a sense of interconnectedness.

Indeed, Goldie pops up in time to finesse the intersection between Liam Bailey and Haile Supreme's flutey, transcendent *Desire* and elusive superstar Yasiin Bey (previously known as Mos Def) on *Bang Bien*, the latter bringing together 70s ska and 2025 hip-hop in one glorious hybridisation experiment.

Other artists to get a look-in include LSK, the polymath rapper best known for his work with Faithless, and R&B singer/rapper Greentea Peng on the rootsy, evocative *I Remember*, which throws up a host of recollections, from going clubbing as a teenager to frequent trips to Nando's.

Exposure for newer artists is a fixture, with Sadie Walker appearing on the funky, soulful *True* and the infectious, trip-hoppy *Starwood Bound*, while Louis VI brings his languorous flow to *Dive Into*, spitting his words just after the beat in an appealingly louche style. These tracks are fine on their own, but work best when listened to in one continuous flow.
Jeremy Allen

NIGHTMARES ON WAX ★
PRESENTS
ECHO 45
SOUNDSYSTEM

© Ollie Trenchard

GARY NUMAN
1000: LIVE AT THE ELECTRIC BALLROOM

BMG

★★★★☆

1000 is named not after the capacity of the comparatively intimate Camden club venue, but Gary Numan's thousandth gig in April 2023, on a special evening for all concerned.

You don't have to have been there to feel the love between artist and fanbase – it rises like steam off this live album. It's in the occasional squeals of "Gary!" from some fans, the recurrent chants of "Numan! Numan!" from others, and what the man himself says when he addresses the audience on his longevity: "I don't feel clever or special or anything. I just feel fucking lucky that you've been there."

After the opening ominous instrumental *Resurrection*, the star deftly picks his way through his back catalogue. There are a smattering of rarely played songs – *Remind Me To Smile* from *Telekon*, the title track from 1997's *Exile* – alongside the pick of his most recent material and, of course, his two No.1s.

Numan is in fine voice, too, with little sign of any wear and tear that has afflicted some contemporaries. Interaction is kept to a minimum, though, and he doesn't acknowledge the crowd until seven songs in, when he's honest enough to admit to messing up *Metal*, after which he launches into a punky relic from another age: Tubeway Army's debut single *That's Too Bad*.

Like all live albums, this is predominantly for the fans. Those who perhaps only know the hits may find it something of a trudge, especially if they have an aversion to loud, grungy guitars. But whatever your level of commitment to this icon of synth-pop, it's still a testament to an artist who, unlike so many of his peers, has managed to remain relevant and, strangely timeless.

Numan is proof the third acts of pop stars don't have to involve the constant recycling of former glories on endless anniversary tours. Stay interested in current music, take chances, and it's possible to sidestep the fate of the heritage act. **Beth Simpson**

ED HARCOURT
ORPHIC

DEATHLESS

★★★★☆

Conceived while attempting to stave off seasonal affective disorder, Ed Harcourt's 17th album is inevitably imbued with the melancholic streak that's been his forte ever since his Mercury Prize-nominated 2001 debut, *Here Be Monsters*.

The Low Spirits is a mournful piece of chamber pop in which Harcourt's wife Gita appears to make her violin weep.

By The Light Of The Silver Morning is the kind of stark gothic folk that Nick Cave would be proud to call his own.

Ed Harcourt
Orphic

There are heartfelt eulogies to The Afghan Whigs' late guitarist Dave Rosser (*A Ghost Walked Through Me*) and longtime hero David Lynch (*In The Embers Of A Dying Flame*).

The latter's *Twin Peaks*-esque guitar twangs isn't the only time the album – named after a classic French romance from Jean Cocteau – gets cinematic. In fact, *Baby's Gone To Seed*, a lament about the state of the current United States, and crooning closer *The Patron Saint Of Restless Dreamers* both hark back to the vintage pop that soundtracked *Blue Velvet*.

And *O' Gentle Death* is a suitably ghostly piano ballad composed for an as-yet-unfilmed tale of the supernatural.

It's all very haunting and unlikely to banish any winter blues, but the consistently strong *Orphic* reaffirms Harcourt as one of Britain's great, darkly poetic modern troubadours.
Jon O'Brien

OLLY MURS
KNEES UP

BMG

★½☆☆☆

Olly Murs has described his eighth album as his most authentic in years: an unfortunate admission, considering it continually depicts an annoying husband, boorish party animal and salt-of-the-earth geezer type. You half expect *Bonkers* ("Full of baked beans and a bit of bacon... lovely") to conclude with a tasteless "Bosh."

Murs' lyrical and personal shortcomings may be easier to swallow had they not come accompanied by such a deeply unpalatable sound, one which flits between ropey Madness tribute act and the glut of contrived Mockney pop that trailed in Lily Allen's wake. On several occasions the Essex singer appears to be channelling Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*.

KNEES UP
OLLY MURS

Murs is more than capable of making great pop when he veers away from his cheeky chappy persona, as shown on *Heart Skips A Beat*, *Dear Darlin'* and *Kiss Me*. But here, only a handful of Teddy Swims soundalikes (*Cut To The Chase*, *Lovin' Really Hurts*) – as well as orchestral closer *Chin Up* can be described as listenable at best.

"I'm hoping I'll be yesterday's news," Murs sings on one of the many interchangeable ska-lite throwbacks. Possibly the most baffling thing to come out of *The X Factor* since Honey G, *Knees Up* suggests – 16 years on from his reality TV big break – his wish may be fulfilled. **JO**

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE
EVERYBODY SCREAM

POLYDOR

★★★★☆

Following the pagan mood of 2022's *Dance Fever*, the trauma of an ectopic pregnancy has led Florence Welch to delve even deeper into early spirituality for her sixth album.

What unfolds is often literally magical: a supernatural voyage perfectly aligned with the singer's dramatic persona, while also mixing in her most intimate confessional in the desolate beauty of *Music By Men*.

With the likes of The Last Dinner Party and Mitski (a co-writer here) tracing Welch's baroque visions, much of the first half sees her celebrate her influence, the playful title track and *Witch Dance* reminding everyone of Welch's ability to flourish by venturing into wild landscapes as deeply as possible.

The personal and gothic vividly combine on *You Can Have It All*, which feels like the culmination of much of her prior work, before the ambient finale *And Love*, where Welch vows, "Peace is coming", possibly a hint that her next album will be a Brian Eno-produced harp odyssey.

Although regular early collaborator James Ford returns as co-producer for the first time since 2015's *How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful*, the only fault is that *Kraken* and *Drink Deep* don't fully realise their pop potential. No matter: this is Florence Welch being as Florence Welch as possible. For that, everybody rejoice. **JE**

PICTURE PARLOUR
THE PARLOUR

EMI

★★★½☆

Meeting in Manchester after arriving from Liverpool and Yorkshire respectively, singer Katherine Parlour and guitarist Ella Risi cite Joan Jett and Marc Bolan as key influences on their energetic debut.

The Go-Go's appear to be another factor on the standout retro rock'n'roll infectiousness of *Cielo Drive* and *Talk About It*, while The Raveonettes' heyday infuses *24Hr Open*'s thrashy pop.

Risi's guitars excel throughout, varying from abrupt punky scissor-kicking in *Who's There To Love Without You* to old-school crunchy soloing on *Neptune 66*. Parlour's vocals are less varied. Her strangulated rasp is effective on the incisive no-frills blasts dominating the album, but she hasn't mastered the emotional heft necessary on the ballads.

It means the second half fades away a little, the anonymous *Norwegian Wood* segueing into finale *The Travelling Show*, which drags on like an am-dram Black Crowes. In fairness, the David Lynch mood of *Ronnie's Note #3* is convincingly off-kilter, a jolt of noir among the gleeful anarchy.

They're far from the only underdog snarling miscreants to sound too wary around a ballad, and you sense this is just the start of something special.

Picture Parlour already sound like they love rock and roll, so put another dime in the jukebox and hammer *Talk About It* or *$4 Fantasy* one more time. **JE**

THE SAINTS
LONG MARCH THROUGH THE JAZZ AGE

FIRE

★★★★☆

The passing of singer Chris Bailey in 2022 robbed the world of a man who, to quote his death notice, "Lived a life of poetry and music and stranded on a Saturday night". If the latter part of that sentence seems odd, it is a reference to *(I'm) Stranded*, his band's debut, a ferocious, Stooges-tinged punk single independently released in Australia in 1976.

The Saints never made it big, but Bailey was a revered figure, namechecked by Nick Cave among others. And if later albums lacked the snarl of Bailey's earliest work, he more than made up for this by adopting a battered troubadour persona that probably wasn't too much of a stretch to inhabit.

THE SAINTS
Long March through the Jazz Age

In 2018, Bailey fetched up in Sydney to record this final release under The Saints' moniker. It's terrific, an LP that's on nodding terms with heartland rock yet has spark, snap and, where needed, delicacy.

Highlights? The whole album, from the Americana-tinged *Empires (Sometimes We Fall)* onwards. Or start with the shimmering *Break Away*. Or the melancholy *A Vision Of Grace*. Or maybe the eerie *Carnivore (Long March Through The Jazz Age)*. Throughout, Bailey's voice, grizzled yet sure, acts as an implicit reminder to embrace life.

Jonathan Wright

CAT BURNS
HOW TO BE HUMAN

SINCE 93/RCA

★★★☆☆

Opening with *Come Home*, a song drenched in grief and set in a hospital ward "blocking the sky", Cat Burns' second album is lyrically raw from the off. That shouldn't be too surprising for listeners familiar with her 2024 Mercury-nominated debut, *Early Twenties*. Burns wears her heart on her sleeve.

Sometimes, this becomes too much. See the breakup song *I Hope It's Me* where, for all you empathise, you may find yourself wishing Burns wouldn't think aloud. Mostly, though, even her most confessional songs work because she has a faculty for telling stories. *How To Be Human* makes you want to know what happened next, or listen again to pick up details missed first time around.

There's something gloriously London about songs that have a surface pop sheen rooted in gospel and soul, yet seem to grow gnarlier over successive plays.

In part, that's because Burns' voice carries so many traces of having been born in Streatham. But it's also because this is an LP that often speaks candidly to a second-generation immigrant experience that's a feature of life in this most international of cities.

And amidst the sorrow, there's plenty of joy, too, as on the sapphic anthem *GIRLS!*, or the first-meeting narrative of *Gemini*, which displays Burns' love of indie-tinged guitar pop.

An album that sounds hard won, yet where Burns comes out ahead. **JW**

SILENT RUNNING
NORTHSTAR

DOOR

★★★☆☆

Although supporting a varied range of artists – from Madness to Talk Talk via Simple Minds – gave the Belfast New Wavers a certain cachet, Silent Running's reunion only came about through playing at a friend's birthday party in 2018, three decades after they broke up.

2022's *Follow The Light* represented the band's initial tentative foray back into the studio for their first album since 1989's *Deep*. This follow-up fifth LP is a step up in quality from three of the original four founding members – *Deep* drummer Gary Kirby remains, rather than Ian Gault.

SILENT
RUNNING
NORTHSTAR

An urgency is injected into songs like *This Is My City Tonight*, imbuing the spirit of rock icons such as Bruce Springsteen and Bryan Adams, with singalong choruses that demand the donning of towelling headbands, with at least one restless leg constantly on the go.

Moreover, Peter Gamble's voice has acquired a coarseness that helps elevate soft-rock ballads like *State Of Mind* and *Don't Look Down*.

The quartet have, after all these years, cracked the formula to becoming a stadium-rock leviathan, only stadiums these days don't want stadium rock. If timing and fashion denies them that audience, and Silent Running might be an anachronism, you sense their fans will be more than delighted with *Northstar*. **JA**

TOM A SMITH
SAY WHAT YOU WANT

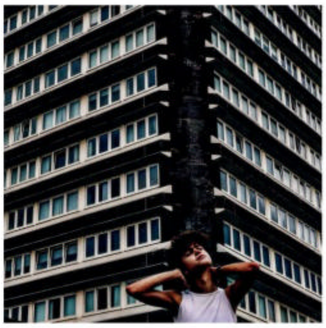
DECEMBER 2025
CLASSIC POP
BEST NEW RELEASE

FICTION

★★★★☆

Set to play Dave Stewart in a biopic of the Eurythmic being filmed next year, Tom A Smith can identify with the precocious side of his fellow Sunderland predecessor: as Tom Mouse Smith, he was playing festivals before he was a teenager.

Still only 21, Smith has quickly matured since returning to music three years ago. Progressing from his early sturdy indie, his debut for Fiction starts with *Fashion*'s Ian Dury-style satirical rant over electrifying keyboards, a vibe maintained during the punkier, more splenetic *What!*



Beautiful Way is closest to Eurythmics, though its contemplative synths under Smith's anthemic pleading chorus are more akin to Tears For Fears at their most confrontational. The jittery *I Don't Blame You* throws all Smith's talents together over a Devo breakdown, topped off by a sudden about turn into goth balladry on a pitch-black cover of The God Machine's *It's All Over*.

Possibly the latter is a nod to Fiction labelmates The Cure, maybe it's a signal that Smith really is impossible to pigeonhole. Whatever, after the engaging enthusiasm and melodic clout of what's gone before, it confirms Smith as one of the finest new British male solo talents around.

Hopefully filming of that biopic won't take too long, as Smith is at that stage where he seems able to master anything he wants. **JE**

HATCHIE
LIQUORICE

SECRETLY CANADIAN

★★★½☆

Recorded in her native Australia, Harriette Pilbeam's third album marks her return from LA back to well-signposted shoegaze tendencies. The poppy *Sage* and shimmering *Lose It Again* suggest Lush, while *Only One Laughing* adds a Cranberries twist, and a Cocteau Twins fixation on the title track ensures Robin Guthrie-style guitars. On *Carousel*, Hatchie adopts Liz Fraser's melodic sweeps before the woozy *Anchor* inevitably borrows My Bloody Valentine's guitars. But if this all seems somewhat derivative, her sometimes sweet, sometimes raw appeal pays off. **Wyndham Wallace**

WHITE LIES
Night Light

WHITE LIES
NIGHT LIGHT

PIAS

★★★★☆

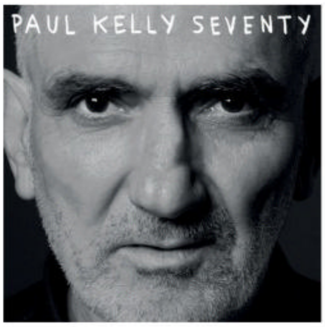
Briefly lauded as next big things a decade-and-a-half ago, the post-punk-influenced trio are not only still here but flourishing. The main reference point remains Midge Ure-era Ultravox, though you can hear glimpses of Bowie (*Going Nowhere*) and Teardrop Explodes (*All The Best*), too. But the songwriting has improved, while Harry McVeigh's vocals now have a character and depth that comes with maturity. This is an above-average guitar pop album that proves that bands – if allowed time to develop – can hit artistic peaks long after the hype has faded. **BS**

ALLIE X
HAPPINESS IS GONNA GET YOU

TWIN

★★★★☆

After the retro-perfect darkwave of 2024's *Girl With No Face*, the Canadian songwriter for BTS, real name Alexandra Hughes, decided to return to her roots. On her fantastic fourth album, that translates to stunning piano compositions, highlighted by the Tori Amos-esque title track, the wryly playful *It Gets Better* and majestic *Learn To Cry*. Better still are songs where analogue and electric instruments collide: see standout track *Is Anybody Out There?*, which features ice-pick keyboards, digital beats and fragile piano. **Annie Zaleski**



PAUL KELLY
SEVENTY

EMI

★★★½☆

"Tell us a story," is a fitting opening line for an album commemorating Kelly's 70th birthday milestone – Aussie rock's great raconteur. The journeyman proceeds to adapt Yeats' *Sailing To Byzantium*, pay tribute to his granddaughter and deliver a sequel to his 1996 signature tune *How To Make Gravy*. Featuring collaborations with his nephew Dan, jazz singer Rebecca Barnard and three-time ARIA Award winner Meg Washington, *Seventy*'s blend of blue-eyed-soul, Dylan-esque country and heartland rock ensures its sound intrigues as much as its tales. **JO**

DECEMBER 2025 CLASSIC POP BEST REISSUE

FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS
FYC40

LONDON

★★★★★

UNLIKELY SUPERSTARS, FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS DIDN'T STICK AROUND ONCE GLOBAL FAME SPOOKED THEM. HERE'S A FANTASTIC DOCUMENT OF WHY THE TRIO BECAME SO MASSIVE.

Fine Young Cannibals haven't come close to reforming, and the trio drifted apart rather than staging a dramatic finale. As a result, they've largely been forgotten in the 29 years since releasing any new music. There are now generations of pop fans who need reminding of both FYC's importance and just how massive they once were on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thankfully, this first attempt at rounding up all things Cannibals does a faultless job of showcasing what a remarkable one-off they were.

Aiming for the timelessness of the soul music they were influenced by at the time, FYC's self-titled debut still glows 40 years on. Yet it's a restless record, politically charged on the empathetic *Johnny Come Home*, *Blue* and *Don't Ask Me To Choose*, while also able to craft elegant ballads seemingly at will: *Like A Stranger* is one of the era's great deep cuts.

Four years later came *The Raw & The Cooked*. At this remove, everything about its success is wonderfully odd: the trio themselves were clearly not cut out for global fame. Although they had to settle for Prince engineer David Z as co-producer rather than the man himself, his influence is clearly evident in the *Sign O' The Times* mood of the brilliantly bizarre *Don't Let It Get You Down*, an unlikely groove for a mega-selling album. Meanwhile, *She Drives Me Crazy*, classic as it is, remains a startlingly minimal song.

And that was it, bar the excellent one-off 1996 single *The Flame*. Roland Gift's unique wide-ranging voice hasn't been heard enough since; Andy Cox and David Steele haven't become the powerhouse production team they should have been.

This 4CD+DVD highlights an affinity for dance culture, established from the off with John Luongo's typically pounding take on *Suspicious Minds*. Mark Moore, Monie Love and Norman Cook all excel, the new remixes work well and there's even unreleased Frankie Knuckles bangers, in addition to Justin Strauss' hugely successful *She Drives Me Crazy*.

The DVD is also ace. Nine television performances and 11 videos showcase the natural charisma of a frontman who initially viewed Fine Young Cannibals as a chance to get into acting. But the main highlight is arguably the pandemonium of a full 1989 show at Seattle's Paramount, which features *Don't Look Back*, *Good Thing* and *I'm Not The Man I Used To Be*.

It couldn't last. It's sad that there are still tensions between the trio, preventing them from enjoying it together again as they deserve. For everyone else, *FYC40* is a reminder of one of pop's great, unusual footnotes. These songs have endured as well as the soul greats they set out to emulate. Job done. **John Earls**

EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL
THE BEST OF

BUZZIN' FLY

★★★★½

The most unique thing about Everything But The Girl was always that the duo were in their own lane, a purpose-built universe. Yes, that universe might have been convenient to pop them into particular categories such as the smoky jazz moods of *Eden*; the standing in the conservatory air of the Red Wedge-adjacent *Love Not Money*, the sleek surfaces of the Tommy LiPuma-produced smoochery in *The Language Of Life* or the sweaty nightlife of *Temperamental*.

THE BEST OF EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL

But the duo's voyage has seen Tracey Thorn and Ben Watt as far more chameleonic than floating voters assume, equally at home on an acoustic 80s round-up with *I Don't Want To Talk About It* or on a 90s club classics collection via *Missing*. Even when they came back in 2023, going "SURPRISE!" with *Fuse* 24 years after *Temperamental*, there wasn't really anyone like them to compete with but the fans they'd accrued over the decades were on board immediately.

Following the recent wonderful occasional residency at London's tiny Moth Club, where the pair have been enjoying playing live again stress-free, comes this tremendous 16-track capsule compilation. Much like peerless collections by Rose Royce and George Michael, *The Best Of* is sequenced like a perfect evening, with bangers and doofers on the first half, going mellow and melancholy on the second.

© Juergen Teller

There are also sublime juxtapositions of old and new, where their jazzy debut single *Night And Day* snuggles up to *Fuse*'s smooth *Run A Red Light*, while the club-facing sparklers such as the skittering metallic trickle of *Walking Wounded* and the enduring homemade mash-up *Tracey In My Room* form a coherent set in themselves.

This isn't a run-through of the hits where some reluctantly released singles obscure the artist's narrative. Rather, it's a mixtape showcase from EBTG themselves that, if this is your first time here, invites you to delve deeper and further. **Ian Wade**

TEARS FOR FEARS
SONGS FROM THE BIG CHAIR

WARNER

★★★★☆

As you're reading *Classic Pop*, you must already know that *Songs From The Big Chair* is one of the greatest and most successful records ever made. The confidence instilled in Tears For Fears by *The Hurting*'s triumph ensured that Curt Smith and Roland Orzabal could venture further into the wild for their second album.

Of course, they'd honed their pop skills, too. *Everybody Wants To Rule The World* was Orzabal's bombast at its peak, while Smith's contrasting fragility shone in *Head Over Heels*, and *Shout* is unlikely ever to be matched in its combination of primal scream therapy and protest lyrics.

TEARS FOR FEARS
Songs From The Big Chair

If Tears For Fears themselves have no time for *Mothers Talk*'s obvious chart-smashing intent, that only proves pop stars aren't always the best judge of their own songs.

So, 40 years on, what else can we learn about such a massive record? Nothing at all from its 3CD (also a 2LP adding selected extras pretty much randomly). All the bonus content has already been featured on the 4CD+DVD 2014 boxset.

So, 11 years on, you can revisit the edits and extended versions, but nothing else. The unreleased early mixes and songs from the *Live At Massey Hall* album have gone, not to be replaced with any other curious from the era.

At least the B-sides are still present on CD1. Thankfully, those remixes on CD3 are superb examples of the era's well-honed Extended Versions' majesty, the mania of *The Way You Are* probably deserving to go on even longer than eight minutes.

It all just feels like a missed opportunity to either revisit that 2014 definitive take, or upgrade it with other extras the duo might be willing to part with, like the complete Massey Hall recording.

Of course, we're arguing with greatness. And it's good to know the duo are as harmonious now as they were in 1985. Let most of it out, but maybe stick to the original LP or hunt down the 2014 edition rather than this halfway house. **JE**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL AN ERA: DISCO 1973-1980

NOW

★★★★½

For the latest instalment in NOW's reliably winning *Eras* series, they've headed to the dancefloor again, this time travelling back to the disco era, charting those majestic years when it took over the world.

Curating proceedings, *Disco* manages to collect timeless classics and smash hits, alongside some slightly lesser compiled gems.

It takes the 1973 cue, when The Hues Corporation's warmly cheery *Rock The Boat* was pretty much the first disco chart-topper on Billboard's lists after it had been picked up by key DJs, up to the 1980 sleekness of wonders such as Stephanie Mills' *Never Knew Love Like This Before* and The Whispers' sublime *And The Beat Goes On* marked something of a bookend to a joyous period of pop.

The whole of the mirrorball is on display here, with the Euro magic of *Yes Sir, I Can Boogie*, *Follow Me*'s neon loneliness, and *Daddy Cool*. If it's wet chiffon campery you're after, then *Get Dancin'* is your soundtrack. If you want to hang out with all the boys, there's the singing job centre of *YMCA*.

Disco's key subject was escape and fantasy, so when *Star Wars* came along, there were no end of songs that envisioned a brave new world, with the likes of *Automatic Lover*, *Can You Feel The Force*, *Galaxy Of Love* and *Spacer* voyaging where pop was previously afraid to go before.

Likewise, there's the topiary-based *In The Bush*, which brought things more down to earth, making for a sexy soundtrack for hedge sex, while Diana Ross sounds like she's sprawled on the bed on the utter dirt of *Love Hangover*.

Disco could be seductively blank, surface and empty, on one-offs such as *Let's All Chant* and *Funkytown*, but it was also a world where KC & The Sunshine Band, Chic, Earth Wind & Fire, Rose Royce, Shalamar and Odyssey were as important as the sort of boring old punk nonsense that gets over-documented.

In fact, you can understand why squares tried to destroy disco, because it was not only multiracial and multisexual, but also because a genre that gave us *Rock Your Baby* and *You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)* was just so much bloody good fun. **IW**

NOW
THAT'S WHAT I CALL AN ERA
DISCO
1973>1980

JAMES
NOTHING BUT LOVE: THE DEFINITIVE BEST OF

UMR

★★★★½

The enduring popularity of James is one of music's more remarkable stories. Formed in Manchester in 1982, they've been around long enough to have performed at the Haçienda and toured with The Smiths.

Decades later, James still remain a vibrant creative and commercial force. *Yummy* topped the UK Albums Chart in 2024, while the band are also fresh off their first US headline tour in 15 years, where they played 1993's *Laid* in full in front of adoring crowds.

Living up to its 'Definitive' billing, *Nothing But Love* goes a long way to explaining the staying power of James.

The 3CD/5LP collection (also out as a 21-track 2LP) illustrates the relative stability of their line-up: Tim Booth and bassist Jim Glennie (who James are named after) have been with the band from the very beginning, while many players have been there since the late 80s.

More importantly, it illuminates the band's restless ambition – James have always bent the pop charts to their will, not vice versa, with an uncompromising creative integrity.

Compiling all 56 singles chronologically, *Nothing But Love* starts with mid-80s indie gems (the limb-shaking *Hymn From A Village*, the taut post-punk of *So Many Ways*, C86 homage *What For*), before travelling through the band's 90s imperial pop phase (the jauntiness of *Sit Down*, soaring *She's A Star*, the yearning *Born Of Frustration*) and more sophisticated fare such as Brian Eno collaboration *Getting Away With It (All Messed Up)* into post-reunion highlights including *All The Colours Of You* and *Waterfall*.

Taking things right to the present day, the set closes with two excellent new tracks: the disco-kissed call to action *Wake Up Superman* and life-affirming *Hallelujah Anyhow*.

For anyone who's lost track of James, *Nothing But Love* is an excellently curated primer of the band's recent work. And for longtime fans, it's refreshing to have such a thorough and thoughtful compilation that truly does justice to James' immense catalogue. **Annie Zaleski**

© Peter Brown

PROPAGANDA
A SECRET SENSE OF RHYTHM: A SECRET SENSE OF SIN

UMR

★★★★★

HOW TO MAKE A 6CD BOXSET BASED ON JUST ONE ALBUM WORTHWHILE – PROPAGANDA'S MULTI-LAYERED ART-POP ALLOWED FOR ENDLESS NEW VARIATIONS, LOVINGLY COLLECTED HERE

Originally released during the acrid pop summer of 1985, Propaganda's *A Secret Wish* always was a lavish and intense proposition, and a whole other world.

In 80s' German music, Propaganda sat nearer to DAF and Einstürzende Neubauten than Nena and Peter Schilling. This made *Dr Mabuse*'s breakthrough all the more thrilling: that a band could reach the Top 30 with a song containing the sound of some crockery being poured into a bathtub.

While ZTT quite Frankiely then had their hands full for the foreseeable, this tantalising glimpse of Propaganda was enough to hook people, as was the press' early "ABBA in hell" description. So, when *A Secret Wish* finally arrived, it was destined to stand head and shoulders above its contemporaries, existing in an area where one could be lightly austere and talk about the minimalist brilliance of Phillip Glass, Stockhausen and the avant garde. It's an album calling on cameos from David Sylvian, Glenn Gregory, Steve Howe, Stewart Copeland and John McGeoch, who all casually pop in to add to the whole ART of it all.

PROPAGANDA

Now comes a lovingly restored summary of Propaganda's time in the ZTT showroom. There's the original album, sensitively remastered by David Kosten, plus an opulent 6CD boxset, which unpacks, rebuilds and showcases *almost* everything: the demo landing them their ZTT deal plus early songs *Doppelganger* and *Disziplin* are absent.

What you do get on CD1 is Propaganda's preferred analogue vision of the original album, alongside Stephen Lipson's *Digital Variation* mix. CD2's *Stahlnetz* – named after Claudia Brücken's dress, as well as a mix of *Dr Mabuse* – contains elements from the *Disturbdance* series, as tinkered with for the *Wishful Thinking* remix album.

Singlette on disc three features the three EPs based on *Duel* and *P:Machinery*, plus the originally planned *Dr Mabuse* cassingle vision, which never happened.

CD4's *Series* collects Propaganda's contributions to ZTT's *Action*, *Incidental* and *Fatal* series, while *Studio* pulls the curtain back to reveal fragments and shards of outtakes from the recording process.

Finally, *(Some Kind Of) Single* houses a fabulous version of *Dr Mabuse* made for John Hughes' *Some Kind Of Wonderful*, as well as various TV and video mixes. All those additional mixes from one album are worth it. Repeat plays are essential.

It makes for the boxset Propaganda deserve. It's a shiny, steely gleaming spectacle, surfacing a twisted and tangled heart of darkness.

This is haute couture pop, where the idea of perfection is shown as a possibility. Even 40 years on, there is still nothing quite like it. **IW**

BLONDIE
NO EXIT

BMG

★★★½☆

Has there been a greater comeback single than *Maria*? For Blondie to return in 1999 after 17 years away, with one of their finest ever hits, was as if they'd been cryogenically frozen since *The Hunter*.

Maria's accompanying album couldn't possibly live up to it, and has remained a little neglected ever since.

This is its first release on vinyl, on a 2LP whose fourth side adds a rare cover of Karen Young's *Hot Shot* and three of the seven remixes rounding out the 2CD edition.

BLONDIE
00.15.00.00
NO EXIT

In truth, it's easy to see why Blondie's seventh album has patiently waited its turn to be re-examined, as it's not so much eclectic as all over the place. Sometimes, that's a boon. Clem Burke earned his first writing credit, and despite its "What, really?" title, the jazzy *Boom Boom In The Zoom Zoom Room* is excellently eccentric, with Debbie Harry vamping it up in full effect. The same can also be said of the closing chant, *Dig Up The Conjo*.

The ska-tinged *Divine* merges well with their incorporation of the kind of dance music that Blondie had helped to pioneer – now thriving in the mainstream – and is also used to great effect in *Nothing Is Real But The Girl*.

However, going pure ska on the opening *Screaming Skin* made for a queasy reintroduction. The title track's dated grunge is already grim before Coolio's perfunctory rap slams behind Harry, sounding far less adroit with trying to drop bars than on *Rapture*. Meanwhile, the cod-Gaelic folk of *The Dream's Lost On Me* is somehow even worse.

That the pure disco of *Hot Shot* was previously relegated to the Japanese-only edition highlights *No Exit*'s wayward execution: it's great dance-pop, and makes more sense to fans than, say, the AOR ballad *Double Take*.

For all those concerns, it was of course great to have Blondie return, and you can't accuse them of not having fun. It's better to have too many ideas than none. If that doesn't excuse some of the moves, it led to *Maria*. So Blondie win. **JE**

KATE BUSH
BEST OF THE OTHER SIDES

FISH PEOPLE

★★★★☆

In an age when heritage acts routinely release lavish boxsets packed with unreleased tracks, live cuts and demos, Kate Bush has been unusually restrained when it comes to opening up her archives. This is perhaps admirable, although fans have grumbled about the way, ever the perfectionist, Bush has taken to tinkering with the artwork of her existing albums rather than, say, compiling a career-spanning Best Of collection, which her catalogue currently lacks.

The real downside to her approach is that you get relatively few glimpses into how Bush works. For all that, she has revisited some earlier material – most radically on 2011's *Director's Cut* – each of Bush's albums sits in a splendid isolation, its mystique maintained.

However, you can get clues over how Bush crafts her extraordinary music from her B-sides, remixes and cover versions. With a few exceptions, these were gathered together for *The Other Sides* on the fourth volume of her *Remastered* vinyl boxsets.

Best Of The Other Sides now edits down that collection and features newly remastered versions of *Experiment IV*, *You Want Alchemy?* and *Walk Straight Down The Middle*. Already available digitally, the physical release arrives on vinyl and CD.

KATE BUSH
BEST OF THE OTHER SIDES

Is it worth the cost? While this isn't a starting point for potential newcomers, the answer is indisputably yes.

Among the numerous highlights are an expansive 12" mix of *Running Up That Hill*, the delicate *Lyra* (originally recorded for *The Golden Compass* soundtrack), and a reggae take on Elton John's *Rocket Man* that it's difficult to imagine anyone else pulling off.

Then there's *Under The Ivy*, a wondrous ballad that recalls Bush's first two albums. Anyone else would surely have selected it as a single, but Bush relegated it to a B-side. And here perhaps is the most important insight into how Bush works: the A-side was *Running Up That Hill*. She was looking ahead rather than backwards. **Jonathan Wright**

THE BEATLES/WINGS
ANTHOLOGY COLLECTION/WINGS

APPLE/CAPITOL

★★★★☆ / ★★★★½

One of the all-time seminal music documentaries, 1995's *Anthology* of Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr coming together to reminisce has been restored with an extra episode by Disney+, who did a great job on *Get Back*.

To coincide, the three-volume outtakes *Anthology* series is now back as a boxset – with an additional volume also available separately. *Anthology 4* loses the boxset a mark: although it has 13 previously unreleased alternative takes and rehearsals, it largely comprises songs from recent mammoth Beatles reissues. Missing off the B-sides from *Free As A Bird* and *Real Love* is frustrating, especially not finally putting *Christmas Time Is Here Again* on an album.

Quibbles aside, given that *Anthology* was overdue a polish – Giles Martin has done his usual exemplary mixing – these 12LP/8CDs offer up constant delights, from the famed first recordings by The Quarrymen and failed audition tape for Decca to *Anthology 4*'s later mucking about even when the mood was generally tenser.

If a giant £300 boxset of outtakes and pre-fame rock and roll covers is only ever going to appeal to a certain breed of devotee, having a new Wings Best Of is a treat almost any pop fan can get behind. There hasn't been a compilation like it since 2001's *Wingspan*, and this 32-track 3LP/2CD is a great intro to what Macca did next.

As well as non-album singles like *Hi Hi Hi* and Bond classic *Live And Let Die* (Hurray!) and *Mull Of Kintyre* (Er...) it houses the fiery *Soily* from the *One Man Clapping* curio.

A highlights 12-song 1LP/1CD is also available, but Wings are a band where you really do need to own all the singles to get an idea of just how wildly McCartney's imagination was firing throughout the 70s.

Now all the Alan Partridge jokes have finally faded away, Wings stand tall as crafting some incredible earworms. Some clichés are truisms, and it's worth restating that, while John Lennon had the social activism in the 70s, McCartney had the tunes. **JE**

THE BEATLES
ANTHOLOGY COLLECTION

RUDE
STUDIO

© 1971 Paul McCartney, Photographer Linda McCartney

MADNESS
HIT PARADE

WEST VILLAGE

★★★★☆

There is, as everyone knows, no need for *yet another* Madness singles compilation: they've now released 13 of them – the same number as their regular albums. A change of record label seems to be the only impetus for this latest set, just four years and one album since 2021's *Our House: The Very Best Of*.

At least Madness' new home have made a proper effort. The cut-down 1LP/1CD is patchy in trying to fit all eras of the Nutty Boys in and will satisfy no-one. However, the 4LP/2CD versions stake a good claim for being definitive and superseding the two or other three Madness singles sets that fans might already own.

It's a no-nonsense round-up of all 45 singles, in chronological order from *The Prince* to three songs from 2023's *Theatre Of The Absurd Presents C'est La Vie*. There are a couple of rarities, via a live 1992 reunion cover of *The Harder They Come* and the politically charged lockdown blast, *Bullingdon Boys*.

Casual fans might ignore the second half, which would be a mistake. If there is a point to this compilation, it's to highlight how the standard has stayed strong. Madness might have become more of an albums band, if only because it's impossible to have a hit now, but their assorted skills for an earworm single have remained unchanged since emerging in 1979. **JE**

MADNESS
HIT PARADE
VOLUME ONE
1979-1986

GOLDFRAPP
SUPERNATURE

MUTE/BMG

★★★★☆

Following one of the greatest pop albums of the Noughties, *Black Cherry*, should have been a marathon task, but 2005 was Goldfrapp's imperial phase. *Supernature* opens with the mighty *Ooh La La* and carries on waltzing around, looking fabulous from there. There's a futuristic glide to *Let It Take You* and *Fly Me Away*, even as *Ride A White Horse* and *Slide In* bounce around the speakers.

The quality continues in the extras on this 2CD+Blu-ray reissue with sole B-side *All Night Operator*'s sheen joined by 11 remixes and five BBC session tracks. Those live songs could have been dropped for more reworkings: contemporaneous mixes including Andy Bell, Ladytron, The Shortwave Set and Phones are all missing.

No complaints over what is included, mind. Not only are we treated to the giddiness of DFA's ping-ponging *Slide In* and The Flaming Lips turning *Satin Chic* into proto-Lana Del Rey vintage glamour, but four new remixes – also included on the 2LP – shine.

Elizabeth Fraser and Damon Reece's *Koko* is charming wonkpop belonging on Goldfrapp's spookier albums, Richard X's *Beautiful* simply hones its pop factor – and Goldfrapp themselves return after eight years, gently finessing *Let It Take You* and *You Never Know* with a knowing "Yes, we *are* back" grin. **JE**

Goldfrapp
SUPERNATURE

KARL BARTOS
COMMUNICATION

BUREAU B

★★★½☆

Released after three albums as his Electrik Music alias, Karl Bartos' 2003 solo debut under his own name is next to impossible to hear without contemplating the past. Though he'd quit Kraftwerk in 1990, the echoes of Bartos' former group remain difficult to ignore, not least in opener *The Camera*, heavy on vocoders and familiar sounds from 1981's *Computer World*. Nor are recollections of other acts' previous work easier to overlook. *Life* recalls early Pet Shop Boys while *15 Minutes Of Fame* offers uncanny reminders of New Order's *Blue Monday* as well as, strangely, The Chills' jolly 1990 outing *Submarine Bells*.

Elsewhere, especially removed from historical context, Bartos carves a niche of his own, whether on the semi-industrial *I'm The Message* or the pulsing *Cyberspace*. Admittedly, its lyrics – "Cyberspace is the place/ For a game/ On a wire frame" – aren't exactly Stephen Hawking-esque, and the cheerful *Electronic Apeman*'s aren't much better: "You've got to learn to become human" seems a little presumptuous.

Nonetheless, the belligerent *Ultraviolet* and Kraftwerk throwback *Camera Obscura* provide a convincing conclusion, rounded off by an atmospheric, beatless *Another Reality*. It's not the future, then, but it's still worth your time. **Wyndham Wallace**

KARL BARTOS COMMUNICATION

MY LIFE STORY
JOINED UP TALKING

EXILOPHONE

★★★★☆

After two albums of majestic symphonic pop, My Life Story joined Andrew Lloyd-Webber's record label It, only to emerge with a sparser, less orchestral and occasionally more desolate air.

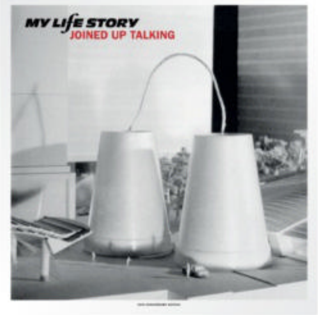
For its 25th anniversary, album three sounds catchier and more fully realised now than in 2000. There's the occasional duff experiment, with Jake Shillingford wholly unsuited to going grunge in *Yes To Everything*, while the caustic accusations in *Sunday Tongue* haven't aged well at all.

Elsewhere, however, *Walk/ Don't Walk*'s Hall & Oates bounce is sublime, and MLS master electro in *Stalemate* far more effectively than dreary rockisms. The songs which do hark back to their past – *Neverland*'s dramatic sweep, *It's A Girl Thing*'s opulent sway – are perfectly poised.

Destined to remain nearly men, Lloyd-Webber was unable to propel My Life Story to the stardom they deserved, and the band promptly split for a decade, ultimately not releasing a new album until 2019.

Always a fine B-sides band, the 2LP adds 13 flips from the era: most peers never wrote an A-side as magnificent as *The History Of The World On Ice*. CD3 features 14 demos, including unfinished piano instrumental *Grieve*.

Lovingly done for an album deserving this level of admiration, hopefully MLS' first two LPs can get a similar deluxe job. **JE**



OUTKAST
STANKONIA

LEGACY

★★★½☆

Andre 3000 and Big Boi were already platinum sellers by the time Outkast released their fourth album in 2000. But, on the strength of kaleidoscopic soul hit *Ms Jackson* – which drew from Andre 3000's relationship with Erykah Badu – and the laidback hip-hop cut *So Fresh, So Clean*, the Atlanta duo leapt to mainstream stardom.

It was a well-deserved honour: The frenetic *B.O.B.* obliterated genre boundaries, while the Public Enemy-reminiscent *Gasoline Dreams* and the taut, jazzy *Spaghetti Junction* demonstrated Outkast's depth.

The bonus tracks on this 25th anniversary 3LP set are mostly different from *Stankonia*'s 2020 reissue. The only overlap is the stellar, aggressive rock-oriented Zack De La Rocha remix of *B.O.B.*

Unfortunately, these tracks, which include additional *B.O.B.* remixes alongside a couple of instrumentals and soundtrack cuts, are all previously released and easy to find.

While the retro-electrofunk Cutmaster Swiff and stuttering Beat Bullies remixes of *B.O.B.* are excellent, it's disappointing that Legacy haven't found a deeper selection of rarities or bonus tracks for the album's big birthday. Luckily, *Stankonia* itself still sounds as fresh and clean as it did upon release, clearly paving the way for 2003's even more successful *Speakerboxxx/ The Love Below*. **AZ**

CLOCK DVA
WHITE SOULS IN BLACK SUITS

THE GREY AREA OF MUTE

★★★☆☆

For the Human League/ABC/ Heaven 17 Sheffield axis of 80s pop, Adi Newton is a revered godfather of electronics. He has never come remotely close to the mainstream – Clock DVA's 20th album *Noesis* snuck out in 2023 – and this first reissue of their 1980 debut shows both why Newton is so respected, and why the public have ignored him.

Recorded in just eight hours and originally released on Throbbing Gristle's label, it's a relentlessly jarring experimental assault on the senses. Newton's aggressive rasp is something you'd imagine Mark E. Smith might respond "Bit much, mate" to. David Hammond's guitars are inventive, but they're throwing out new ideas from moment to moment, too fractious to settle on anything coherent.

It's all bound together by Roger Quail's mesmeric drums, which pound as hard as the avant-garde noise surrounding him while also keeping a beat going, whether on the relative calm of *Still/Silent* or *Discontentment*'s angered clatter.

Remastered and expanded with four early songs from the era, it's an important document. Whether or not you make it to the end – *You're Without Sound* seemingly doing very bad things to Newton's cutlery drawer – is another matter. File under "Heroically uncompromising" or "Give it a rest," depending on your threshold. **JE**

CLOCKDVA
WHITE SOULS IN BLACK SUITS

DOVES
SO, HERE WE ARE: THE BEST OF

EMI NORTH

★★★★½

Although the recent *Constellations Of The Lonely* maybe deserved more time to shine in its own right, having Doves back again with a second reunion album means a new Best Of to supersede 2010's *The Places Between* compilation is a reasonable proposition.

While respected as hypnotic, questing indie, Doves also stuffed their albums with some absolute bangers: no indie disco in the Noughties could function without *There Goes The Fear* or *Pounding* giving it plenty. It's an ethos kept up since their return, *Renegade* and *Cold Dreaming* earning their place alongside *Black And White Town* and *Here It Comes*' percussive thrills.

So, Here We Are
Best Of
doves

This new 19-track set deserves to replace its predecessor, with early B-side *Darker*'s shuffling groove a welcome surprise. The only lull is in following shrugging deluxe edition track *Lean Into The Wind* with the equally ho-hum "new" song, *Kingdom Of Rust*-era outtake *Spirit Of Your Friend*.

However, from 2010 compilation's dropped songs only the haunting *Andalucia* is really missed here.

An excellent reminder of Doves' many strengths, it works well as both a persuasive argument for anyone on the fence and a celebration for fans wanting Maximum Doves. Now, any chance of an updated reissue of *Lost Sides*, please? **JE**

GOLDIE
TIMELESS

LONDON

★★★★★

In the 30 years since *Timeless* was released, thus far it's living up to its name. Goldie's drum 'n' bass masterpiece is as indomitable as it ever was.

Tracks like *Jah The Seventh Seal* come at you like articulated Xenomorphs, pristine and terrifying in equal measure.

It is the sound of an artist in complete control, redefining electronic music with an insouciance that only comes when true genius strikes.

G O L D I E
T I M E L E S S

Pop sensibilities converge with almost prog-like ambition on the title track, with *Inner City Life* swept up into a sprawling 20-minute soundscape that detours into outer space.

Back in the mid-90s, when new digital possibilities suddenly presented themselves, Goldie would isolate sounds in the studio, interrogating synthetic snares and cymbals and flipping them intermittently like the Stockhausen of jungle, marrying Diane Charlemagne's yearning vocals with scuttling breakbeats.

Timeless was era-defining and made with state-of-the-art technology, which makes the fact it doesn't sound dated all the more miraculous. That Midas touch would desert Goldie after the critical mauling he received for the subsequent *Saturnz Return*, but following *Timeless* was always going to be a thankless task. After all, how do you improve upon perfection?

Jeremy Allen

LEVELLERS
ZEITGEIST

WARNER

★★★☆☆

In their 90s heyday, Levellers were like The Jam for travellers, a band whose shows induced scenes of beery singalongs and young men hugging their mates. At the time, derided for being lumpy and leaden, they sold plenty of records but didn't get many good reviews.

This expanded 30th anniversary reissue of their fourth album suggests The Levellers were far better than their critics allowed. That's not to say the band was especially innovative, but you could say the same about far hipper, Britpop-adjacent bands from the era. What the folky punks did possess was an ear for a tune.

LEVELLERS zeitgeist

For proof, listen again to the Top 20 hit *Hope St.* Its righteous anger at urban poverty isn't subtle ("Your old man's going through the bins"), but comes across as prescient in an age of austerity. Throughout the album, the band prove adept at switching between anthemic and folkier tracks.

The 2LP adds a disc of extras, including the single version of *Just The One* which features Joe Strummer on piano, and *Alive*, recently extracted from the vaults for single release.

There's also a 3CD edition, the third disc largely consisting of demos, but worth hearing – if only for the interview sections featuring comedian Simon Munnery's alter-ego Alan Parker, Urban Warrior: "Do you want to level up or down?" **JW**

NORTHSIDE
CHICKEN RHYTHMS

LONDON

★★★★☆

Often used at the time by critics as a shorthand punchline for the fag-end of Madchester, Northside's sole album from 1991 merits reassessment, for having a lot more to offer than bargain basement baggy.

There's a conviction to Dermo's vocals, most obviously resembling Tim Burgess in their mystical groove, yet also carrying the intensity for something better in life which Liam Gallagher would soon distil. Check the drive Dermo sings about winning life's lottery in *A Change Is On Its Way*, or the Squeeze-esque characters peopling *Weight Of Air*.

He's helped throughout by the late Tim Walsh's choppy guitars and a rhythm section worthy of Happy Mondays. That's where Madchester comparisons resonate, but when Northside conjure up a brutalist party like *Tour De World* or the shamanic *Yeah Man*, who cares?

Produced by Ian Broudie, it can often feel very early 90s: *Take 5* sounds like it's about to burst into The Wonderstuff's *Dizzy*, while *Shall We Take A Trip?*'s gurning lyrics are now positively quaint. But Northside deserve the last laugh, with a reunion album due next year.

While standalone single *My Rising Star* still isn't on the reissued vinyl, at least the two new remixes on the expanded CD, by The Reflex and Leo Zero, are excellent, evoking the era without sounding forced. **JE**

AIR
THE VIRGIN SUICIDES REDUX

WARNER

★★★★☆

2000 was an interesting time for Air, who were seen as untouchable after the swoon of *Moon Safari*, with no end of Airalikes cropping up like weeds.

The duo were keen not to be confined by its success, scoring Sofia Coppola's debut movie and applying their wide-eyed watercoloured retro-futurism, felt like a no-brainer. Recorded in a fortnight, *The Virgin Suicides* manages to perfectly balance the mood and atmosphere of the 1975-set film on the soft-focus *Playground Love*, while utilising gauzy, heady electronics on the exquisite *Clouds Up* and *Highschool Lover*. The latter is basically *Playground Love* replayed to pitch between the drowsy glide of disconsolate solo Beatles and *Melody Nelson*-era Serge Gainsbourg.

Reissued as a 2CD+Blu-Ray, it sounds less like 2000 now than it did back then, with the Vibraphone Version of *Highschool Lover* making it feel like a lost KPM track. While it's all enchanting, one might drift in and out of CD2 without realising you've gone through several takes of *Suicide Underground*, where even the somnambulant saxophones of The Flower Pistols' retitled remix *Nosferatu* is another version of *Playground Love*.

Its initial soundtrack status is now almost irrelevant, as the main album has managed to long outlast any memory of the movie it was made for. **IW**

AIR THE VIRGIN SUICIDES REDUX
NEW ANALOG MIX 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

SPLIT ENZ
ENZYCLOPEDIA VOLUMES ONE & TWO

CHRYSALIS

★★★★☆

Before Neil Finn joined older brother Tim in Split Enz and steered the band in a poppier direction, the New Zealand troupe were shambolic art-rockers who came across like a feral Roxy Music. That's abundantly clear from this rarities-packed 5CD/3LP+Blu-ray boxset of their early years.

In addition to including their first album, 1975's *Mental Notes* – a defiantly original debut that dabbled in prog and folk – the compilation features 2025 mixes by Eddie Rayner that beef up Split Enz's second LP, the 1976, Phil Manzanera-produced *Second Thoughts*, and a disc of early tracks. Highlights on the latter include the pastoral *Malmsbury Villa*, flute-augmented *Split Ends*, and jovial orchestrated *Sweet Talking Spoon Song*.

Given the Rayner mixes, also having a remastered version of *Second Thoughts* here feels superfluous. But the fifth CD is a real treat, largely thanks to newly unearthed rough mixes (led by a piano- and horn-heavy *Late Last Night*, which sounds like a jazz band coming apart at the seams) and a handful of unreleased 1975 live songs.

The latter, including a jubilant *129 (Matinee Idyll)*, emphasise how well Split Enz balanced their pop instincts and offbeat tendencies. Fifty years on, the band still sound like nobody else – and *Enzyclopedia* deftly details how that happened. **AZ**

SPLIT ENZ
ENZyclopedia

HÜSKER DÜ
1985: THE MIRACLE YEAR

NUMERO

★★★★☆

By 1985, Minneapolis trio Hüsker Dü were on fire, with a series of increasingly impressive albums on Californian indie SST delighting clued-up fans and causing major labels to take notice, eager to bring them to a much-deserved wider audience.

While global fame didn't quite follow (seeing as they weren't built to last much longer), they nonetheless secured a place in hardcore and college rock history. This 4LP/2CD set captures Hüsker Dü just over halfway through their lifespan with a series of live recordings, including a newly discovered homecoming set from January 1985 at Minneapolis' First Avenue club, showcasing a band at their absolute height a fortnight after unleashing their seismic third studio album *New Day Rising*, where a meld of punk energy fused with a nod to 60s pop.

At times in the other 20 tracks from that year's tours, it feels like you're in the direct path of a jet engine: all blast and burst, onslaught and trebly attack.

The Dü's pop chops certainly seep through on covers of The Beatles' *Ticket To Ride* and *Helter Skelter*, as well as The Byrds' *Eight Miles High*. These arrive amid the sheer fire of *Chartered Trips* and *Pink Turns To Blue*, with the overall feeling of witnessing a trio en route to success on their own terms being something to behold. **IW**

OASIS
FAMILIAR TO MILLIONS

BIG BROTHER

★★★½☆

After October's pathetic 30th anniversary package for *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?*, Oasis' team redeem themselves by finally reissuing the band's only live LP released during their original run.

Limited to 1,000 copies on its first release, the 3LP vinyl edition of one of the last gigs at the original Wembley Stadium in 2000 was selling for £550, pretty much the rarest vinyl LP of the Noughties. So, credit where credit's due for getting it back out, along with an equally necessary 2CD edition.

The album itself, however? Well, it definitely wasn't worth *those* prices. For anyone lucky enough to see Oasis on their reunion shows, *Familiar...* is a bracing reminder of just how messy the Gallaghers were in concert by *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants*.

While Liam's grim between-song chat is mostly edited out, you can sense the fractiousness that had seeped in: this is Oasis setting the tone for the rest of their final decade. It means there are still some brilliant moments, like the dubby comedown paranoia of *Gas Panic!* – accurately introduced as "It's a good fucking tune, this, come on!" for anyone waiting around for a less intense *Wonderwall*.

One for the hardcore fanbase, casuals would do well to instead wait for whatever document of the reunion tour will arrive. **JE**

oasis
FAMILIAR TO MILLIONS

© Dave Freak

SELF ESTEEM
O2 ACADEMY BIRMINGHAM

15 SEPTEMBER

★★★★☆

FRESH FROM SCORING HER HIGHEST EVER CHART PLACING, REBECCA LUCY TAYLOR RETURNS WITH A DRAMATIC NEW STAGE SHOW FOR THE COMPLICATED WOMAN TOUR

It begins more like a sermon than a pop concert. Through billowing dry ice, at the back of the dimly lit stage, a line of barely visible figures emerge, dressed in black and white nun-like garb. Breaking the silence is the opening track from *A Complicated Woman* – Self Esteem's bold third album, which landed her a No.5 chart placing in May.

Entitled *I Do And I Don't Care*, it builds from a congregational choral swell into a stark, conversational monologue before the rising voices return and gather for the powerful refrain: "If I'm so empowered, why am I such a coward?"

It's just one of many difficult questions posed tonight by an imposing Rebecca Lucy Taylor (aka Self Esteem).

Earlier, Johannesburg's Moonchild Sanelly, whose growing list of collaborators include Little Simz and Gorillaz, wowed with a swift 30-minute set. A truly larger than life character, her enthusiasm is as infectious as her rolling electronic beats. Backed by Ash, her equally exuberant knob-twiddling and dancing/voguing comrade, left-field electropop fuses with 80s/90s African vibes, minimalist hip-hop and more.

Impossible to ignore, her set quickly develops into a joyous singalong, with Ash happily throwing poses and blasting bubble guns. A booty-shaking *Scrambled Eggs* is a cheeky delight while Sanelly's solo take on Self Esteem collab *Big Man* has the entire venue, arms aloft, belting out "I'm a fucking big man, what are you?" in unison.

One of the UK's most perceptive and rewarding pop stars, Self Esteem takes a slower route to build her collective moments as *I Do...* slides into the clattering, uneasy *Mother* – a burning dismissal of a self-absorbed partner. From there, she piles on the drama with the scuzzier choir-less, dramatic *Lies* and more traditionally poppier *You Forever.*

Lyrically direct and often dark, Rebecca recounts and dissects specific and (presumably) personal events, yet skilfully establishes an impressive relatability from the start.

Joined by her singing/dancing troupe, there's a palpable onstage warmth and kinship that's absent from studio recordings, too, enforcing a collective sense that we're all in this together – a notion amplified by the welcomed return of Moonchild Sanelly for the confrontational *In Plain Sight.*

But Rebecca's not without humour, as the quiet ballad *Logic, Bitch!* has her taking a phone call on a banana, while *Cheers To Me* sees Team Self Esteem battling flailing inflatable tube men for attention.

A Complicated Woman is performed in its entirety (though not in track order), along with a handful of cuts from the album's predecessor, *Prioritise Pleasure.* The staging is spot on – tightly rehearsed, often theatrical, though never flashy, and all done with a relaxed camaraderie. It is no surprise that she's enjoying a parallel West End career.

That sense of *show-womanship* extends to the final send-off as dancers and musicians wrap up with a stage-filling bow and a conga line exit to Shirley Bassey's defiant disco f-you, *This Is My Life.*

From a dramatic, taut, *Handmaid's Tale*-esque start, tonight concludes on a clear high, another collective show of strength, leaving the audience with a euphoric and empowering sense of freedom. **Dave Freak**

LYRICALLY DIRECT AND OFTEN DARK, REBECCA SKILFULLY ESTABLISHES A RELATABILITY FROM THE START

SETLIST

❶ I Do And I Don't Care
❷ Mother
❸ Lies
❹ 69
❺ You Forever
❻ Logic, Bitch!
❼ Prioritise Pleasure
❽ Fucking Wizardry
❾ The Curse
❿ In Plain Sight
⓫ What Now
⓬ The 345
⓭ Cheers To Me
⓮ If Not Now, It's Soon
⓯ The Deep Blue Okay

ENCORE

⓰ I Do This All The Time
⓱ Focus Is Power

© Dave Hogan for Robbie Williams

ROBBIE WILLIAMS
DINGWALLS, LONDON

9 OCTOBER

★★★★☆

AHEAD OF A RUN OF INTIMATE DATES NEXT FEBRUARY, THE STADIUM-FILLING STAR TURNS THE CLOCK BACK AND RAISES THE ROOF AT HIS SMALLEST-EVER SOLO SHOW

"So, it's 1997 again," announces Robbie Williams to a crowd of hardcore fans at Camden's sticky-floored, 600-capacity Dingwalls. Squint and you could take him at face value: there are no mobile phones (which were confiscated at the door) and there's a distinct air of 90s hedonism in the air. His smallest-ever solo gig finishes at around 1am, which only adds to the blurry club-set vibe.

The premise of the night is summed up by the red tracksuit top he's donned for the occasion, a nod to the famous photos of him partying with Oasis at Glastonbury in 1995. First, he'll rattle through his debut album, *Life Thru A Lens*, in full. Then he'll air the upcoming *Britpop*, which he describes as the record he would have made after leaving Take That if he'd been armed with all the wisdom he has now. In the case of both records, this means Gallagher-sized anthems and lyrics so tongue-in-cheek it's a marvel he can even get them out.

Flanked by seven band members, including two backing singers, he's clearly having the time of his life away from the pressures of his *Britpop* stadium tour. Indeed, he announces that there will be four more dates in this UK mini tour. Instead of projecting to the nosebleed seats with all the gimmickry that entails, he says, "I'd just like to sing my album to you." Cue a raucous cheer from the faithful, who beat 70,000 fans who tried to get in ("two tickets each and that's a Knebworth," swaggers Robbie).

> FLANKED BY SEVEN BAND MEMBERS, INCLUDING TWO BACKING SINGERS, HE'S CLEARLY HAVING THE TIME OF HIS LIFE

Inevitably, *Angels* and *Let Me Entertain You* provide the most explosive moments – it's as if the room can barely contain their choruses – but his between-song monologues are enthralling, too. The 51-year-old treats the show like an inverted *This Is Your Life*, explaining the circumstances that inspired each song and how *Angels* miraculously pulled him out of the £300,000 of debt he fell into after Take That.

The untested *Britpop* half of the gig holds up surprisingly well. Hard-rocking lead single *Rocket* was "meant to be played at a venue like this," Robbie notes, accurately, before admitting that *Spies* bears more than a passing resemblance to Oasis' *Champagne Supernova.* "Noel," he quips, "don't have the brass neck to sue me, all the things you've nicked!"

He unveils a bizarre synth-pop track called *Morrissey*, which he and Gary Barlow co-wrote from the perspective of a stalker obsessed with the former Smiths singer, as well as *Cocky*, a glam stomper co-penned with Supergrass' Gaz Coombes.

Towards the end, Robbie's feeling so comfortable that he confesses his real reason for delaying *Britpop*'s release until early next year... If he scores his 16th UK No.1 album, he will beat the record he shares with The Beatles, and he couldn't bear for Taylor Swift's *The Life Of A Showgirl* to deny him the accolade. Whatever happens, this "incredibly special gig" (his ever-modest words) is one for the ages – be it 1997 or 2025.

Jordan Bassett

SETLIST

❶ Lazy Days
❷ Life Thru A Lens
❸ Ego A Go Go
❹ Angels
❺ South Of The Border
❻ Old Before I Die
❼ One Of God's Better People
❽ Let Me Entertain You
❾ Killing Me
❿ Clean
⓫ Baby Girl Window
⓬ Hello Sir
⓭ Rocket
⓮ Spies
⓯ Pretty Face
⓰ Bite Your Tongue
⓱ Cocky
⓲ All My Life
⓳ Human
⓴ Morrissey
(21) You
(22) It's OK Until The Drugs Stop Working

LIVE AID – THE DEFINITIVE 40-YEAR STORY
PAUL VALLELY

NEW MODERN

★★★★½

FROM POP AND POVERTY – TO POLITICS AND POWER
LIVE AID
THE DEFINITIVE 40-YEAR STORY
PAUL VALLELY
BOB GELDOF

When Paul Vallely dubs this epic overview of the Live Aid story 'definitive', he's certainly not overselling it. Running to almost 600 pages, its depth and scope is impressive.

And he's not just reviewing this historic event in retrospect, Vallely was there from the very start. He was reporting on the Ethiopian famine back in 1984 for *The Times* when Bob Geldof first came across his writing.

The Boomtown Rats frontman then invited the journalist to accompany him to Africa to see how the funds raised would be spent.

In the years since, Vallely has formed a close friendship with Geldof and his behind-the-scenes knowledge of the Band Aid, Live Aid and Live 8 charitable cause is impeccable.

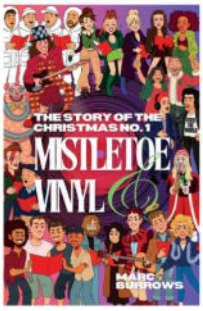
Apart from the political back-and-forth and Sir Bob's run-ins with Margaret Thatcher, Bill Clinton and Vladimir Putin over the years, there's a wealth of music-related stories to enjoy, including Geldof giving Boy George a bollocking to get on a Concorde to attend the *Do They Know It's Christmas?* recording session.

But this is no hagiography of Geldof, Vallely doesn't shy away from presenting the various criticism that Bob has faced down the years. It's clear which side the author's on, but he presents a fair and balanced overall account. **Steve Harnell**

THE STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS NO.1: MISTLETOE & VINYL
MARC BURROWS

McNIDDER & GRACE

★★★★☆



Thanks to Mariah Carey and her annual videos declaring "It's Time", the first day of November is now widely accepted as the official opening gambit on playing festive music. It signals either utter joy or complete despair at the thought of two months of perennial hits, depending on your feelings towards the holiday season.

Mistletoe & Vinyl may not seem appealing to anyone less enamoured with Yuletide fun, but Marc Burrows' *Story Of The Christmas No.1* instantly reveals itself as a genuinely enjoyable read for all pop fans, using the cultural phenomenon of the festive chart-topper as a foundation for a hugely entertaining romp through six decades of music trivia, social commentary and anecdotes aplenty.

Including Phil Spector's classic compilation, glam rock royalty's 70s dominance and the 90s girl power of Mariah and the Spice Girls, Burrows covers everything in meticulous detail and it's recounted with a warmth to thaw even the most hardened Christmas killjoy. Speaking of which, the book is brought up to date with Simon Cowell assuming the role as the Grinch who stole the Christmas No.1 thanks to *The X Factor*'s reign and LadBaby's sausage roll-inspired charity hits.

A nostalgia-filled celebration of some of pop's most loved (and loathed) hits. **Mark Lindores**

PUNK: THE LAST WORD
CHRIS SULLIVAN & STEPHEN COLEGRAVE

OMNIBUS PRESS

★★★☆☆

PUNK
THE LAST WORD
CHRIS SULLIVAN & STEPHEN COLEGRAVE

Oh, how *Classic Pop* chuckled when Steps told us, "We were kind of punk rock..." But, as the prologue to this book suggests, "punk" is an attitude that can be applied to anyone. As Chris Sullivan and Stephen Colegrave open with a left-field list of "historical harbingers" – like Socrates, Diogenes and Blackbeard the Pirate – hopes are raised that this might offer slightly more than a 1-2-3-4 wander through the genre's glory days. Sadly, that's not entirely the case.

The writers acknowledge that "millions of words have been written about punk," and argue that, 25 years after their previous book on the topic, *Punk: A Life Apart*, it merits a reappraisal – but you do wonder why.

Our guides tread a well-worn path through New York's Bowery district and London's King's Road, encountering a cast of familiar faces: Ramones, New York Dolls, Sex Pistols, The Clash, Siouxsie... and there's a fond look back at the forefathers with the odd enjoyable detour to hot spots around the UK.

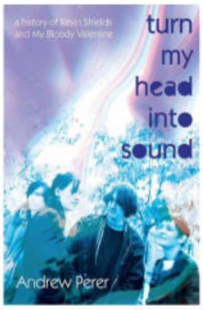
There are also brief forays into fringe scenes, but its primary focus stays fixed on 1976-79.

The Last Word does offer some entertaining insight across 150 original interviews but there's no excursion to Washington D.C., Seattle or the Bay Area, nor any mention of the countless artists who continue to fight the good fight... or, indeed, Lee, Claire, Lisa, Faye and "H". **Dan Biggane**

TURN MY HEAD INTO SOUND: A HISTORY OF KEVIN SHIELDS AND MY BLOODY VALENTINE
ANDREW PERER

JAWBONE

★★★☆☆



At first glance, My Bloody Valentine aren't the most obvious candidates for a full-book retrospective. Though they've been in existence for 42 years, Kevin Shields' shoegaze outfit have released just three albums, that's 15 less than fellow noiseniks Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds and the same number as 23-year-old Billie Eilish. On a second look, though, that's exactly why something like this is needed. Those first two records – 1988's *Isn't Anything* and 1991's *Loveless* – remain profoundly influential, yet as author Andrew Perer asserts: "There remains a strange disconnect between the magnitude and reach of Shields' innovations and contributions as a musician and the number of people who know about them."

Perer's research is scrupulous throughout, giving space to 2013's *m b v*. "Since then," Perer writes, "it's been 12 years without new music." Why, is a question the writer can't seem to answer. While new songs have turned up in live sets, there's been no indication that a fourth album is in the works.

Lacking any fresh interview with Shields, *Turn My Head Into Sound* doesn't quite put the enigmatic frontman into focus, but it does its primary job in honouring a band that have, since the late 80s, defied categorisation. **Steve O'Brien**

CLASSIC POP MOMENTS

MADONNA WINS SEVEN BILLBOARD NUMBER ONE AWARDS

21 DECEMBER 1985

While there's little doubt that Madonna partied like the rest of the US on 25 December 1985, she would still have been in high spirits after Billboard revealed its Number One Awards four days earlier.

Among the seven accolades she received were Top Pop Artist, Top Pop Female Artist (for both albums and singles), and Top Dance Sales Artist – an extraordinary achievement for the newly-crowned Queen of Pop, whose debut single, *Everybody,* didn't even make the Billboard Hot 100 when it was released in 1982.

Now, here she was, the publication's big winner, and on her way to becoming the world's most popular and successful female performer.

The recognition topped off an incredible 12 months for Madonna. She'd headlined hit movie *Desperately Seeking Susan*, securing her first UK No.1 with its spin-off single *Into The Groove*. She'd also won over the crowds at Live Aid in Philadelphia, embarked on the Virgin Tour (with Beastie Boys as her opening act) and on 16 August married actor Sean Penn.

She may not have had a new album out at the time, and *Careless Whisper* may have just pipped *Like A Virgin* as the best-selling single in the US, but in every other way, 1985 was without question Madonna's year.

Steve O'Brien

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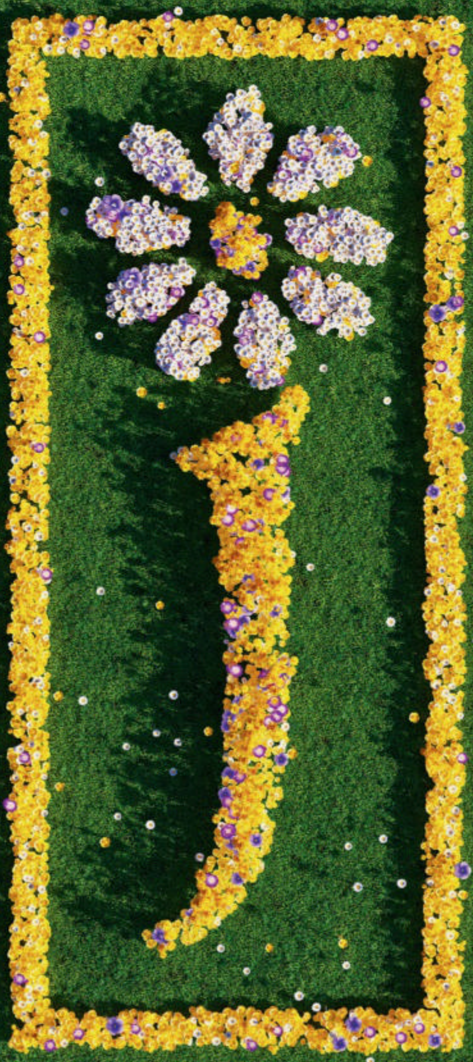

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